

# ST. JOSEPH CAFASSO



## PRIEST OF THE GALLOWS

By ST. John Bosco

**The Life of**

**St. Joseph Cafasso**

**St. John Bosco**

NIHIL OBSTAT:     Jacobus Browne

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## PREFACE

The primary purpose of the publication of the brief account of the life and work of St. Joseph Cafasso contained in these two panegyrics by St. John Bosco is to make the saint known to as many of the clergy and laity as possible. For if the special work entrusted to him by Divine Providence was the training of young priests and the conducting of clerical retreats, he also found time to exercise a fruitful apostolate among the laity, especially among the outcasts of society. Those who wish to have a more detailed account of the life of the saint will find it in *Work While You Have Light: The Story of St. Joseph Cafasso, the Priest's Priest*, published by the Grail.

A secondary object of this booklet is to serve as an introduction to the works of the saint: *The Priest the Man of God*, *A Retreat for Priests* and *Sermons for the Laity*. An English translation of these has already been made and will be published as soon as possible.

These two panegyrics, to which an appendix was added, were published in pamphlet form by St. John Bosco himself soon after they were delivered. In a short introduction to this pamphlet he states the following:

"At the time, I had no intention of getting these funeral orations printed, for they were simple, familiar discourses, addressed to a gathering composed of our boys and of friends whom I might call my dear children in the Lord; but the repeated requests made to me by persons of authority have induced me to publish them.

"Since I am aware that many devout persons eagerly desire to have some memento of Don Joseph, I have thought of adding as an appendix two exercises of piety composed and practiced by him, which are *The Exercises For a Good Death*, which he was accustomed to make once a month, and his *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament for Every Day of the Week*, which he was accustomed to make every day without fail."

A second edition of this pamphlet was published at Chieri in 1933. It is from this second edition, a copy of which was kindly lent to me by the Consolata Fathers of Turin, that this translation was made. The saint is the uncle of their founder and the patron of their Missionary Institute.

Patrick O'Connell

# INTRODUCTION

These two panegyrics preached over St. Joseph Cafasso by St. John Bosco contain an account of the superhuman activity of this extraordinary man during the comparatively short span of forty-nine years of life allotted to him, and between them give a vivid picture of his life from his earliest youth to his saintly death.

The first panegyric, being delivered immediately after the death of the saint at St. John Bosco's own church before the boys of his institute, is in familiar style and gives the more vivid picture; the second, which was preached two months later in the church of St. Francis where the saint had ministered during his life, on a solemn occasion before an audience which included several bishops and three hundred priests, is more studied and detailed. It was inevitable that there should be some repetition, but the two panegyrics supplement each other, and details omitted in one are supplied in the other.

The following skeleton account of the life of the saint will serve as a bond between the two panegyrics, and will supply a few necessary details not found in them.

St. Joseph Cafasso was born on the 15th of January, 1811, at Castelnuovo d'Asti, now Castelnuovo Don Bosco, in the Province of Piedmont about twenty miles from Turin in the north of Italy. He had as his contemporaries two saints who, like him, exercised their apostolate in the city of Turin. These were St. Joseph Cottolengo, who was twenty-five years his senior, and St. John Bosco, who was only a little more than three years his junior. St. Joseph Cottolengo was the founder of the famous hospital at Turin which has grown to become a little city within a city with 10,000 inmates and twelve religious orders, and which has existed for over a century without bank account or funds, depending on the Divine Providence alone.

St. Joseph Cafasso's early life partly resembled that of St. Aloysius Gonzaga and partly that of St. Therese of Lisieux. He was never known to tell a lie, to say a wrong word or in fact to do anything that had even the shadow of sin. His apostolate may be said to have begun with the age of reason and to have continued to grow in intensity until the day of his death.

After a preparation for the priesthood which was that both of a model student and of a young apostle, he was ordained a priest in 1833, at the age of twenty-two, having obtained a dispensation for defect of age. As soon as he was ordained, he entered the college at Turin that had been established for the training of young priests. When the three years' course was finished, he was appointed professor in the college and soon became famous for his learning and sanctity, attracting students to it from all parts. He was afterward appointed rector of the college and held that position until the time of his death, having spent in it twenty-four years in all as professor and rector. Though the onerous duties of the position, which he performed so perfectly as to earn the title of "The Priest's Priest," would have taxed the capacity of any ordinary priest, he found time for the various other forms of apostolate so eloquently described in these two panegyrics by St. John Bosco.

## *His Relations with St. John Bosco*

Although St. Joseph Cafasso was only a little more than three years the senior of St. John Bosco, the relations between them were at first those between a small boy and a grown man, for though they were neighbors, they never met until our saint was already a clerical student while Don Bosco was still a boy intent on fun and amusement. The relations between them later on in life were those between a young priest and one of mature judgment and great experience. Don Cafasso assisted Don Bosco in his studies for the priesthood; as soon as the latter was ordained, he received him into the college for priests in which he was now a professor, made him his assistant in his apostolate among the neglected boys of Turin, helped him to found a separate institute for them, provided him with funds, defended him when occasion arose, acted as his adviser in all things until the time of his death in 1860 and is now the patron of the Don Bosco Institute and of the Missionary Institute of the Consolata Fathers founded by his own nephew, Canon Allamano.

Let us then allow St. John Bosco to tell the story of his patron and benefactor, without whose advice and consent he would undertake nothing as long as our saint lived.

Patrick O'Connell

July 1st, 1957

# The First Panegyric on St. Joseph Cafasso

*Discourse of St. John Bosco delivered as a funeral oration on the 10th of July, 1860, on the life of the saint as a boy, as a cleric, as consoler of those condemned to death, and in his own holy death.  
(From the booklet printed at Chieri, Piedmont, 1933.)*

My dear boys and venerable friends,

I do not know whether sentiments of mourning or rejoicing should predominate in our hearts this morning as we meditate on the life and precious death of Don Joseph Cafasso. Certainly, if in the death of Fr. Joseph Cafasso we consider the loss of a benefactor of poor humanity, we have grave reasons to grieve and mourn as people struck by a great misfortune; for his death was a loss for the good, a misfortune for the poor, a disaster for the clergy and a public calamity for religious.

But if we consider our loss in the light of faith, we have good reason for changing our grief and lamentation into consolation and rejoicing. For if we have lost a great benefactor on earth, we have the firm confidence that we have acquired a friend in Heaven who will use his influence with God to protect us.

And indeed if we cast a glance over the life of Don Joseph Cafasso and consider the innocence of his life, his zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, if we consider his great virtues—his faith, hope, charity, humility and penance—we shall have to conclude that by the practice of these virtues in an eminent degree he has acquired a great reward, and that in dying he has merely abandoned this mortal life full of miseries, and has gone to the possession of a happy eternity.

Besides, according to St. Paul, the virtues of a man while he is on earth are imperfect, and are not worthy to be compared with the heavenly virtues; therefore, if the virtues of Don Cafasso were great even when he was on earth, how much greater will they be now that we believe him to be in Heaven! If while on earth he did good and conferred benefits as one man, in Heaven he will have the power of ten, a hundred or even of a thousand to help us in our needs. Those who have been able to enjoy the charity of Don Cafasso when he was on earth were fortunate, but more fortunate are those who recognize him as their protector with God in Heaven.

In order that you may be convinced of the truth of what I say, I ask your kind attention while I relate to you the principal actions of the life of this marvelous man. I say the principal actions, because the greater part of his good deeds are still unknown, but with time and diligence they will be collected and will provide precious material for history. In the meantime, I shall limit myself to what I have seen or heard. And even of these things, I shall have to pass over a great deal—partly because the time at my disposal is too short to relate them, but principally because the relation of many things that I have witnessed would arouse in me such emotion as would prevent me from speaking. However, even limiting myself to a short discourse, and relating only those things which are known to all who were acquainted with him, I believe that they will be sufficient to convince you that Don Joseph Cafasso lived a saintly life and died a holy death.

These are the thoughts that occur to my mind as I think on this dear and compassionate friend, and these thoughts will form the subject matter of my discourse. And while we recall the virtuous actions and precious death of Don Joseph, we will say that he has taught us the way to live well, and that he is a model for all who wish to have a happy death.

## *Don Cafasso as a Boy*

It happens to many boys, whether through having the misfortune of falling under the influence of bad companions or through neglect of their parents, or because they neglect to profit by the good education they receive, that they lose the inestimable treasure of the innocence of childhood before knowing its value, and that they become slaves of the devil without even tasting the sweetness of being children of God. Such was not the case with Don Joseph Cafasso. From his very infancy his docility, obedience, recollection and love for study and pious exercises made him the object of complacency both for his parents and his teachers.

The characteristic virtue of his boyhood was his spirit of recollection and retirement, joined to an almost irresistible inclination to do good to his neighbors. He regarded the day as most happy for him when he was able to give some good advice, to promote some good or to prevent some evil. At the age of ten he became a little apostle in his native district. It was



a common thing to see him coming out of his parents' house and going to seek his companions, relatives and friends. He invited them all, old and young, to his parents' house. When they arrived there he made them kneel down and say a short prayer; he then got up on a chair, as his pulpit, and preached to them, or rather repeated the sermons that he had heard in church, and related edifying examples. He was of small stature and of weak constitution, but he had a pleasing voice and an angelic countenance, so that all who listened to his words and discourses, so much above his age, went away filled with wonder, repeating the words that were spoken about the infant John the Baptist: "What a one, think ye, shall this child be?" (*Luke 1:66*).

You, good people of Castelnuovo, when you listened in astonishment to the boy Cafasso and asked what will this boy be, did not know then, but I am here in a position to tell you. That boy will be a model of virtue at school, he will be a mirror of devotion, he will guide many wayward on the path of virtue, confirm many virtuous and make them advance still higher; he will be a father to the poor, the delight of his parents; he will in a short time arrive at such a degree of virtue that he will know no road but that which leads to the church or the school; he will, at fifteen years old, after spending his youth in study and the pursuit of virtue, resolve to give himself wholly to God in the ecclesiastical state, in order to labor solely for the glory of God; he will one day become the teacher of young priests and will provide the Church with many worthy ministers and gain many souls for Heaven.

### *Life of Don Cafasso as a Clerical Student*

The short time at my disposal obliges me to pass over many facts and come at once to that happy day for me when I first met him. It was in the year 1827 at Murialdo, which is a suburb of Castelnuovo d'Asti; the Feast of the Maternity of Our Lady, which is the principal feast for the people of that place, was being celebrated. Some were busy in their houses, others were engaged in decorating the church, while others were going around seeing the sights or were taking part in games or other pastimes.

I saw one person far away from all the spectacles; he was a cleric, small in stature, with shining eyes, affable appearance and angelic countenance. He was leaning against the door of the church. I became enraptured with his appearance, and although I was only completing my twelfth year, being moved by the desire to speak to him, I went over to him and said, "Reverend Sir, would you like to see some of the sights of our feast? It would give me great pleasure to act as guide anywhere you wish to go." He made a gracious sign to me to come nearer and began to question me about my age, my studies; he asked me whether I had yet received my First Communion, how often I went to confession, where I went for catechism, etc. I was enchanted with the edifying manner in which he spoke; I replied willingly to all his questions, and then, by way of thanking him for his affability, I repeated my offer to accompany him and show him the sights and the novelties.

"My dear friend," he replied, "the sights to be seen by the priest are the functions of the Church; the more devoutly they are celebrated, the more pleasing they become to us. Our novelties are the practices of religion which are always new, and therefore to be frequented assiduously. I am merely waiting here for the church to be opened that I may be able to enter."

I was inclined to continue the conversation, and I added, "What you say is true, but there is a time for everything—a time to go to church and a time to amuse oneself."

He began to laugh and ended the conversation with these memorable words which might be said to be the program of the actions of his whole life: "He who embraces the clerical state sells himself to the Lord, and must henceforth set his heart on nothing in the world except what can redound to the greater glory of God and the advantage of souls."

Amazed at his reply, I inquired about the name of the clerical student whose words and conduct manifested the spirit of the Lord, and I learned that he was Joseph Cafasso, a student in the first year's theology whom I had often heard spoken of as a model of virtue.

If time permitted me to give a detailed account of the luminous virtues that he displayed during his years as a student, both when he lived at home in his native district and in the seminary at Chieri, what a number of interesting and edifying facts I could tell! I shall merely summarize his life as a student by saying that the gifts which adorned his life as a cleric were charity toward his companions, submission to his superiors, patience in supporting the defects of others, caution never to offend anyone, affability in listening to, advising and helping his companions, indifference about what was set before him at the table, resignation in the trials that he encountered in his station of life, alacrity in teaching catechism to boys, edifying conduct everywhere, diligence in his studies and in the performance of his religious exercises. These virtues which he practiced in an heroic degree gave rise to the saying that became common among his companions and friends, that the cleric Cafasso had never been under the influence of original sin. There is a long series of edifying deeds performed by him as a cleric to illustrate this point, but I am compelled to pass them over in order to have time to say something about his life as a priest.



But who are you, I ask myself, who attempt to give an account of the marvelous deeds of this hero? Do you not know that his most beautiful actions are known only to God? Do you not know that the most gifted writer would have to compose many big volumes in order to speak in a worthy manner of the things that are known to the world? I know all that, and I assure you that I find myself in the position of a small boy who enters a garden to gather a few flowers and who finds every corner of the garden so filled with the most beautiful blooms of varied kinds that he remains confused and does not know what to do. In my attempt to speak of the priestly virtues of Don Cafasso, I am, like that boy, at a loss to know how I am to begin, what I am to say first, and what to say after that. I shall therefore confine myself to selecting and weaving into a garland the virtues which shone forth in a particular manner in his public life as a priest and his private mortified life. I shall begin with his public life.

His zeal and eloquence in explaining the word of God caused him to be invited from all directions to give triduum, novenas, retreats and missions to the people of various districts. Full of courage, he did all in his power for all in order to gain all for Jesus Christ. But after some years, being no longer able to perform such heavy and continuous labors, he had to confine himself to preaching to the clergy, who appeared to be the portion of human society entrusted to him in a special way by Divine Providence. And, in this department, who can relate all the good that he did by the retreats that he preached, by his public and private conferences, by supplying books and money to priests in poor circumstances in order that they might be able to complete their studies and exercise their sacred ministry in a worthy manner?

To his public life belongs also the apostolate that he exercised among poor boys. These he instructed in the truths of religion; he provided the most needy with clothes, in order that they might be decently clad for attendance at Mass. He also secured employment for some with God-fearing masters; for others he paid the expenses of their apprenticeship. For others still, he supplied bread until they were able to gain their livelihood by their own labor. He had begun to put into practice this ardent spirit of charity when he was a boy. He continued it when he was a cleric, and it shone forth in him with redoubled zeal when he was a priest. The first catechist of our present oratory was Don Cafasso; he was a constant promoter and benefactor of the work while he lived, and is its patron after his death.

### *His Apostolate in the Prisons*

To the public life of Don Cafasso belong also the entire days that he spent in the prisons—preaching, comforting, instructing the unfortunates detained there, and hearing their confessions. With regard to his work in the prisons it is difficult to say whether his courage or his charity is the more worthy of praise, but we may solve the difficulty by saying that his ardent charity inspired him with heroic courage. Out of the many such acts of his of which I was witness I select the following which is characteristic of him.

He had gone to the prison in order to prepare the prisoners for the celebration of a feast in honor of Our Lady, and had spent a whole week instructing them and exhorting them. This he did in a large room in which there were forty-five of the most noted criminals. Almost all had promised to go to confession on the vigil of the feast. But when the day came, none of them could make up his mind to go to confession. He renewed his invitation, recapitulated what he had said during the week, and reminded them of the promise that they had made. But whether it was through human respect, or the temptation of the devil, or some other vain pretext, none of them would consent to go to confession. What was Don Cafasso to do?

His ingenious charity and courage found a way out of the difficulty. With a smile on his face he went over to the man who appeared to be the biggest and strongest and most robust among the prisoners, and without saying a word, he caught hold of his luxurious long beard. The man, thinking that Don Cafasso had acted through jest, said to him as courteously as could be expected from such people, "Take anything else from me you like but leave me my beard!"

"I will not let you go until you go to confession," replied Don Cafasso. "But I don't want to go to confession," said the prisoner. "You may say what you like, but you will not escape from me; I will not let you go until you have made your confession," said Cafasso. "I am not prepared," said the prisoner. "I will prepare you," said Cafasso.

Certainly, if the prisoner had wished, he could have freed himself from Don Cafasso's hands with the slightest effort; but whether it was respect for the holy man's person, or rather the fruit of the grace of God, the fact is that the man surrendered and allowed himself to be led to a corner of the room. Don Cafasso sat down on a bundle of straw and prepared his friend for confession. But lo! In a short time there was commotion; the strong man was so moved by Don Cafasso's exhortation that his sighs and tears almost prevented him from telling his sins.

Then appeared the great marvel; he who had been most vehement in his refusal to make his confession went to his

companions after it was finished and told them that he had never been so happy in his life. He became so eloquent in exhorting them that he succeeded in persuading them all to go to confession.

I select this example out of thousands of its kind because whether we consider it as a miracle of grace on the part of God, or a miracle of charity on the part of Don Cafasso, we are forced to recognize in it the intervention of the hand of God.

On that day Don Cafasso continued hearing confessions in the prison until the night was far advanced. In the meantime, the doors of the prison were locked and barred, and it appeared that Don Cafasso would have to sleep with the prisoners. But at a certain hour the prison guards, armed with pistols and swords, entered and began to make their accustomed visit. On seeing the stranger they all began to shout at the same time, "Who goes there?" and without waiting for a reply they surrounded Don Cafasso saying, "What are you doing here? Who are you? And where do you want to go?" As Don Cafasso was trying to reply they shouted, "Stop him and make him tell who he is!" Finally, he told them who he was. They asked him why he had not left in time, and told him that now they could not allow him to go out without acquainting the governor of the prison. He reminded them quietly that it was their fault not to have searched the prison before locking the doors. Finally they agreed to let him out, and even sent a guard to protect him on the way home.

With regard to the rest of the public life of Don Cafasso, let those many priests and laymen come forward and relate it! Let those people, rich and poor, who are debtors to him—some for their learning, some for the means of acquiring it, some for their employment, some for the peace that they enjoy in their families, some for the trades that they exercise, some for the bread that they eat—come forward and acknowledge their debt to him!

I know of many who, either on account of the poverty of their condition or of grave disasters that happened to their families, could not have risen from their poverty were it not for the charity of Don Cafasso. Some of these are now parish priests, others assistants, others schoolmasters; others still are notaries, lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, attorneys; others still are agents for companies, owners of shops, traders and merchants. And while upon the death of Don Cafasso they lament the loss of a tender father, they give testimony to the truth and say, "Don Cafasso was our benefactor; he helped us to clothe ourselves, he helped us to pass our exams, he advised us, he recommended us, he helped us spiritually and corporally; to him we owe our honor, our learning, our employment, the bread that we eat."

Let those many sick people come forward and tell how they have been comforted by him! Let those dying whom he assisted, that long series of penitents of every age and condition who found in him on every day and at every hour a pious, learned and prudent director of conscience, come and tell all they owe to him!

Finally, let those unfortunate men who had been condemned come forward and bear witness to his heroic charity! Having abandoned the practice of religion they had given themselves up to despair, but being assisted—and I might say, conquered—by the irresistible charity of Don Cafasso, they died a most consoling death, leaving us the moral certainty of their salvation.

Oh! If Heaven would only come and relate for us the public life of Don Cafasso, there would, I believe, be thousands upon thousands of souls who would proclaim in a loud voice, "If we are saved, if we are enjoying the glory of Heaven, we owe it to the charity and zeal and labor of Don Cafasso. He delivered us from dangers; he guided us on the path of virtue; he rescued us from the brink of Hell, and brought us safely to Heaven."

### *The Private Life of Don Cafasso*

Let us now pass on from his public life to speak briefly of his private life. By his private life I mean particularly the exercise of the virtues practiced in his familiar private occupations, which for the most part appeared very little in the eyes of the world, but which perhaps are the most meritorious before God. And here, what a long series of edifying deeds, of luminous virtues, presents itself for our consideration! What mortifications, penances, abstinences, prayers, fasts were done within the walls of his room! Every moment that was free from the occupations of his sacred ministry was given to prolonged audiences which might be said to have been interminable. He was always ready to receive, console, advise and confess in his own room. Sometimes he was weary to exhaustion so that he could scarcely make the sound of his voice heard; and, not infrequently, he had to deal with rough people, slow of understanding, whom nothing would satisfy. Nevertheless, he was always serene in countenance, affable in speech, and never allowed a word or an act to appear that showed the slightest sign of impatience.

Oh! If the walls of that privileged room could speak, to what virtues, to what acts of charity, of patience, of suffering, it would render glorious testimony! Always affable and beneficent, he never allowed anyone to depart without consoling him with spiritual or temporal comforts, or at least without having suggested to him some maxims useful to his soul. The multitude of those who sought to speak to him constrained him to be expeditious in dealing with their business. Therefore, without losing any time in compliments or ceremonies, he came to the point immediately; with astonishing facility, he grasped what the person

wished to say at the first indication given, and gave a prompt, frank and complete reply.

He did all this with such humility, respect and promptness, that an eminent personage could find no words to describe this singular prerogative of Don Cafasso except these: "He had no time for what was merely human; all was for charity."

He understood and was constantly preaching that every moment of time is a great treasure, and therefore he took advantage of every moment and every occasion to do good. When going out, or descending the stairs, when going or returning from visiting the sick or those in prison, he was almost always accompanied by someone with whom he discussed the affairs of the sacred ministry, or spoke words of comfort to someone who could find no other occasion to speak with him.

After meals he took part in the recreation of his students, but that was a time when he gave them his marvelous lessons. They drank in like milk his advice on how to live in society, on how to treat the world without becoming slaves of the world, on how to become true priests furnished with the necessary virtues to make them ministers of God capable of giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

But the most marvelous thing in the private life of Don Cafasso was his exactness in the observance of the rules of the ecclesiastical Institute of St. Francis. As superior of the institute, he might have dispensed himself from many things both on account of his weak health and the importance and multitude of occupations which were crushing him. But he had fixed in his mind the maxim that the most efficacious means a superior has of commanding is his own personal example by preceding those under him in the fulfillment of their respective duties. Accordingly, in even the smallest things, such as being present punctually for the conferences, for meditation, for meals, he was like a machine that the sound of the bell brought instantaneously to the fulfillment of the duty for the time.

I remember that on a certain day I brought him a glass of water. He had it in his hand when the bell for the Rosary rang. He drank no more but put it down and was going immediately to that practice of piety. "Drink it," I said to him, "and you will have time afterward to go to prayer." "Do you wish me," he said, "to prefer a glass of water to a prayer so precious as the Rosary which we say in honor of Our Blessed Lady?"

### *Mortified Life of Don Cafasso*

To his private life belongs that secret and continuous mortification of himself. In this we see the great art used by him to make himself a saint. We know and have proof that he used the hair shirt, that he put objects in his bed to make it uncomfortable, that he practiced rigorous corporal penances. But leaving these things aside, I shall speak here only of what I and all who have known him have seen. However tired he might be, he never supported himself either with his elbow or in any other manner to rest himself; he never rested one leg on the other; at table, he never complained of anything or said that anything did not please him; everything was to his taste. From his earliest youth he had devoted certain days to particular acts of mortification. Every Saturday was a day of strict fast in honor of our Blessed Lady. But why speak of a fast on Saturday when the whole week, the whole month, and the whole year long were for him one continuous, rigorous and terrible fast? He began by diminishing the number of his meals and restricted himself to one meal in the day, which consisted of soup and a small quantity of bread or potatoes. Some of his friends, on seeing this prolonged austerity, respectfully reproached him and said that he was injuring his health by it. They tried to persuade him to be more moderate, if not out of love for himself, at least for the good of others. He merely laughed and said that he enjoyed excellent health on the diet he had adopted. When they referred to the exhaustion of his strength which was diminishing every day, he immediately replied, "O Heaven, what strength and health you will give to those who enter there!" If he was benumbed by cold, or suffocated with heat, or covered with sweat, he never sought any comfort, nor was he ever heard to utter a word of lament or complaint.

At all times of the year he spent many hours hearing the confessions of the faithful, and it was not uncommon for him to enter the confessional at seven in the morning and remain there until twelve o'clock. After remaining there for so long, even in the very cold weather, when he came out to go to the sacristy the people could see that he trembled all over and was compelled to lean for support on the benches to prevent himself from falling; often when halfway down the church, he had to rest either by kneeling or sitting down. The people were very much moved by such a sight, and several of them wanted to buy at their own expense a heated footstool in order to lessen a little the effect of the cold. The sacristan decided to buy one, but fearing that Don Cafasso would not allow him if told beforehand, he bought the footstool without telling him and put it in the confessional before Don Cafasso arrived there. As soon as he saw the luxury, as he called it, he kicked it with his foot into a corner of the confessional, and afterward told the sacristan not to put it there again, saying that these things are useless and that they give people the idea that a priest, who, he said, does not need such things, is too careful about himself. Various reasons were given him why he should use it, but neither in this nor in any other circumstance was it possible to persuade him to moderate the severity of his penances, which certainly contributed to consume a life so precious.

He kept aloof from all kinds of amusements. During the thirty-two years that I knew him, I never saw him take part in a game of cards, tarot, chess, billiards or other pastime. (He sometimes played games with the prisoners, in order to gain their confidence.) When sometimes invited to take part in some game, he would reply that he had something else to occupy him, and that when he no longer had any urgent business he would go and amuse himself. And when he was asked when that would be, he would reply, "When we are in Heaven." Besides the constant mortification of the senses of his body that he practiced, he was the foe of all habits, even the most indifferent. "We should habituate ourselves to do good and nothing else," he would say. "The body is insatiable; the more we give it the more it demands."

He therefore never allowed himself to form the habit of using tobacco, or taking sweetmeats or drink of any kind other than water, except that ordered by a doctor. During the course of his studies in college or in the seminary, he took neither coffee, nor fruit, nor anything between meals.

After his first ten years as professor at the post-graduate institute (he was there as professor for twenty-four years), he became prefect of the conferences, and though his work was very heavy, his collation consisted of a few pieces of dry bread. One day someone suggested to him that for a person of his frail constitution with such exhausting labors more nourishing food was needed. He replied good-humoredly that the time would come when he would have to make some concession to his body, but that as long as he could do without it he did not wish to take anything more.

After some years, however, he was compelled by obedience to moderate a little his rigorous manner of living. But in spite of his weak constitution and his delicate health, he would never allow himself to become accustomed to any particular kind of food, and he went on diminishing the amount until, as I have already said, he limited himself to one meal a day, which consisted of soup and a little something else at hand. Although subject to many infirmities, he would not prolong for a moment his ordinary time of repose, which was barely five hours each night.

During the cold weather of winter, even at times when he suffered from sick stomach, headaches, toothache, to a degree that he was scarcely able to stand on his feet, he was to be found kneeling in prayer before four o'clock in the morning, meditating, or engaged in some occupation.

This strenuous, laborious life of penance, prayer, charity, labor and self-denial he continued to live up to his death which struck him at the moment when we had the greatest need of him, at a moment unexpected by us, but calmly awaited by him, for his whole life had been a constant preparation for death.

The time available for this discourse has passed all too quickly, and I am compelled to pass over very, very many things that I would wish to relate. However, I hope that you will bear with me for a little longer and listen patiently while I tell about the last hours on earth of Don Joseph Cafasso.

### *His Saintly Death*

Let us draw a veil over the events<sup>1</sup> which certainly contributed to deprive us of a person so dear to us, so useful and so precious. Let it suffice to say that a life so pure, so holy, so closely resembling the life of Our Savior, was to be requited with ingratitude by a world that did not know him, by that world for the benefit of which he had expended his substance, his health and his life. In these painful circumstances we adore the decrees of Divine Providence.

It is a truth of Faith that at the point of death a man gathers the fruit of what he has sown in the course of his life. "What things a man shall sow, these also shall he reap." (*Gal. 6:8*).

Now as Don Cafasso had lived a life filled with good and holy works, good and holy should be his death. It was a familiar saying of his, often repeated, especially in his moral conferences: "Fortunate is that priest who spends his life for the good of souls; most fortunate is he who dies laboring for the glory of God. He will certainly receive a great reward from that Supreme Master for Whom he labors."

Now we shall use these words of his and say, "Fortunate are you, Don Joseph Cafasso, who have spent your entire life in promoting the glory of God and laboring for the salvation of souls; most fortunate are you who have terminated your life in the midst of the labors of the sacred ministry."

It is believed, and there are strong reasons for this belief, that he received a special revelation from God of the day and the hour of his death; during his last days, he gave indications that this was so to those who had the good fortune of being able to speak to him. He was accustomed to settle his affairs every day as if he were on the eve of his death. And before going to bed each evening, he arranged the things in his house as if that night were to be the last of his life. But he spent the three days which preceded his last illness almost completely shut up in his room. He regulated everything that regarded the good functioning of the college; he gave suitable directions to the servants; he replied to some letters; he put all his writings in order; he put every little bit of paper in its proper place; he wrote down some things to be added to his will; then he made the



exercise for a good death that he was accustomed to make without fail at the end of each month.

In the meantime, the morning of Monday, the 11th of June arrived, and Don Cafasso, having arranged all his affairs and made ready for the journey to eternity, was walking in his room waiting for the voice of the Lord to tell him to come. But he suddenly recollected that he had still a little strength left which could be used for the good of souls. Joyful in mind, but not without a painful effort, he made his way from his room to the confessional, and there spent several hours hearing confessions of the faithful whom he guided with singular learning, prudence and piety on the road to Heaven. It was noticed, however, that his method of hearing confessions was not the same as usual. He recommended all to detach their hearts from earthly things, to love God their Creator with all their strength, to pray Him to take them away soon from the dangers of this life and bring them to Heaven. "O Paradise, Paradise," said he to one penitent, "why are you not sought after and desired by all? Why do you delay? Why, oh why?" But man is only man; the eagerness to gain souls for God continued in that great soul, but his strength failed. He was constrained to abandon that confessional where for the space of twenty-five years he had been the faithful dispenser of heavenly favors to so many souls; he had to abandon that confessional never again to return to it.

With slow steps he betook himself to his room. But before placing himself on the bed, he knelt down and recited those memorable words which he had written down: "The sorrow that I experience, O Lord, for not having loved Thee, the desire that I feel to love Thee ever more, render this life burdensome and grievous to me beyond measure, and force me to pray Thee to come quickly and shorten my days on earth and to remit to me Purgatory in the next life so that I may be able to go soon to enjoy Thee in Heaven." He was able to say no more, and in order not to fall exhausted on the ground, he placed himself on the bed about eleven in the morning.

His disease was an affection of the lungs with hemorrhage of the stomach. The doctors tried every means of their art but in vain. Each day it seemed to them that the patient was improving, but in reality, as he said himself, he was getting nearer to the moment of departure for Heaven. From the first day of his illness he said frankly that he was not going to get well and that he wished to leave this world and go to Heaven.

To those who asked him if he felt better, if he had rested well, he replied always, "As God wills." He asked for the prayers of all. He told me one day to ask the boys of our house to pray for him. "We have done so," I replied, "and we shall continue to pray for you, but I have told the boys that you would come some feast day to give them Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament." "Be at ease," he replied. "Go on praying, and tell the boys that I will bless them from Heaven."

When asked if he had anything to get written, any remembrance to give, any commissions to leave, he looked at me smiling and said, "It would be a nice thing to have waited until now to settle my affairs. Everything has been settled for this world. One thing remains for me to settle with God; it is that in His great mercy He will bring me to Heaven soon."

A remarkable thing was noticed by all: he received everyone who came to visit him with his accustomed goodness, but after a few minutes gave a sign that they should leave. The reason was he did not wish anyone to remain talking to him longer than was strictly necessary. I watched him closely as I was going out of his room, and saw him join his hands, kiss the crucifix repeatedly, and then, turning his eyes toward Heaven, speak uninterruptedly as if in familiar conversation. From that I became convinced that he desired to be alone in order to be able to converse more freely with God. However, having remained alone with him one day, I remarked to him that it would be better for him to have someone constantly near his bed to give him whatever he required and to speak some words of comfort to him. "No," he replied immediately. Then raising his eyes to Heaven he said with emphasis, "Do you not know that every word spoken to man is a word robbed from God?"

Even when his illness was threatening his life, in his very death agony, he loved to be alone. He gave no sign of pleasure even when ejaculatory prayers were suggested, as if such prayers interrupted the ordinary conversation that he certainly had with God. However, he asked all to pray for him and to recommend him to the protection of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. A person of high authority who was on intimate terms with him during his life and visited him several times in the course of his illness, having observed carefully what he said and did, at the conclusion of one of these visits exclaimed, "Don Cafasso has no need of our suggestions; he is in direct communication with God. He engages in familiar conversation with the Mother of the Savior, with his angel guardian and with St. Joseph."

There are many things that I would like to relate about his admirable patience in bearing with his illness, about the words spoken to his friends, the blessings given to many and especially to his dear young priests of the college, about the edifying manner in which he received the Last Sacraments, but these things would cause me such emotion that I would not be able to speak.

I will merely say that, comparing his last illness with that of St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis de Sales, St. Philip Neri and other great saints, it appears to me that his death was equally precious in the eyes of God. And how could it have been otherwise? If his life was holy, should not his death have been likewise holy?

He had great devotion to our Blessed Lady, and was a constant promoter of devotion to that heavenly Mother. For every Saturday and, we might say, for every moment, he had some pious practice or said some ejaculatory prayers in her honor. Saturday was a day completely devoted to her; he observed a rigorous fast, everything she demanded for that day was promptly conceded, and on many occasions he expressed the desire to die on a Saturday. Frequently during his life he said, and has left it in writing, "What a beautiful death to die for the love of Mary! To die on a day dedicated to Mary! To die at a

moment most glorious for Mary! To go to Heaven in the company of Mary! To have the happiness of being near Mary for all eternity!"

O fortunate soul, your desires have been satisfied! You are at the thirteenth day of your illness, a Saturday, a day of Mary; you have received a few hours ago the most sacred Body of Jesus. Now Jesus calls you and wishes to give you that Heaven that you have so much desired, for which you have labored all your life. Mary, your Mother, to whom you were so devoted in life, now assists you and accepts you. She herself will conduct you to Heaven. Behold! Don Cafasso smiles, he breathes his last breath. His soul flies upward in the company of Jesus and Mary to enjoy a happy eternity.

With good reason we hope that after a death so precious in the eyes of God the soul of Don Cafasso did not even touch the pains of Purgatory, but flew straight to Heaven. Therefore, instead of praying for him, I would suggest to you that you should rather have recourse to his heavenly intercession. But since the All-holy and All-pure God finds stains in the angels themselves, we, in fulfillment of a duty of gratitude and friendship, offer to God our prayers, our Communions, our alms, our works of charity in suffrage for the soul of our lamented benefactor. But if these works are not needed to liberate him from the pains of Purgatory, they will serve to help some suffering souls for whose relief he labored so much in life and whom he recommended so often to the prayers of the faithful.

Listen still, dear brethren, for a moment! Among the last words of Don Cafasso are the following which are truly worthy of eternal remembrance: "When I shall have departed to the grave," said he, "I pray the Lord to make my memory perish on the earth so that no one will think of me except those few faithful ones who will, as I hope, come to pray for my soul. I accept in penance for my sins all that will be said against me in the world after my death."

Dear Don Cafasso, that prayer of yours will not be heard; you wished to humiliate yourself so that your glory might go with you to the grave, but God wishes otherwise. God wishes that you be exalted and that you be crowned with glory in Heaven. Your memory is the memory of the just, which shall last for eternity: *"In memoria aeterna erit justus."*

Your memory will last among the priests, because you were their model in sanctity during life and their master in the science of the Lord; your memory will last among the poor, who will lament your death as that of a tender father; it will last among those in doubt to whom you have given holy and salutary advice; it will last among the afflicted to whom in so many ways you have brought consolation. It will last among those in their death agony whom you have comforted, among the unfortunates in prison whom you have visited, among those condemned to death whom you have sent to Heaven. It will last among your friends, and your friends are all those who have known you; it will last among all those who honor the great benefactors of humanity such as you were during the whole course of your life. In fine, your memory will last among us, because the charity which you had for us on earth is an assurance for us that you are our protector with God, now that you are glorious in Heaven. Live then for eternity with God, O great and faithful soul! The time of suffering for you is past; there will be for you no more pain, no more affliction, no more sickness, no more persecution, nor will there be death anymore. God is your reward. You are in Him, you are with Him, and near Him you will enjoy every good thing in Heaven. Mary, your heavenly Mother, whom you have so loved and caused others to love on earth, now wishes you to be near her in order to give you the recompense due to the filial affection which you had toward her.

But from the midst of your glory, deign to cast a look of pity on us whom by your departure from the world you have left orphans. Intercede for us and grant that by living according to the directions you have given, and following the luminous examples of virtue that you have left, we also may one day attain to the possession of that glory which will be enjoyed with Jesus and Mary and all the saints of Heaven for all eternity.

## The Second Panegyric on St. Joseph Cafasso

*This second panegyric was delivered on the 30th of August, on the occasion of a solemn commemoration of his death held in the church of St. Francis of Assisi, where the saint had ministered during his life. This commemoration was surrounded with great pomp and ceremony: the church was elaborately decorated, and besides a very large concourse of the laity, there were no fewer than three hundred priests present.*

"He wrought that which was good, and right, and truth, before the Lord, his God, in all the service of the ministry of the house of the Lord." (2 Para. 31:20,21).

There is one person alone who, if he were here among us at this moment, would be our joy and delight, but he is no more. In this church he exercised his ministry; in it, he knelt and prayed; in it are the altars on which a short time ago he offered the Eucharistic Sacrifice. You have here still—look over and see it—the confessional in which he purified, consoled and comforted our souls; you have also that chair of truth from which, with holy zeal, he explained the word of God, but he himself is no longer here. That gloomy reminder of the departed, that stately bier, and, much more, your sorrowful appearance, tell me that our friend is no longer among the living.

Ah! Don Cafasso, Don Cafasso, where are you? Why have you left us? Come at least even for a moment and comfort us.

I hear a voice which appears to me to come from Heaven saying, "Grieve not, for I am still among you." Yes, my brethren, Don Cafasso is still with us. It is true that his soul is enjoying its happy repose with God, but he lives, speaks, converses with us. He lives with us in the holy actions that he performed in the course of his life; he lives among us through the numerous spiritual sons who, having drunk in from him the milk of prudence and wisdom and piety, are scattered over various countries where they teach, preach, propagate his doctrine, his counsels, his moral precepts. He converses with us by the holy rules of a good life which he gave us *viva voce* and left to us in writing. He lives, and I hope that from his place in Heaven he will look benignly upon us his friends who are gathered here in veneration of him.

You have been moved by two considerations to come to this church today: to be present at the celebration of a religious function, and to listen to an account of the virtuous actions of a distinguished benefactor. On me has been imposed the duty of delivering an appropriate oration. The first part, namely the exercises of piety, the decorations, the sacred chants and other religious rites have all been prepared in splendid fashion. As to the part that has fallen to my lot, I confess that I find myself in great difficulty, and I do not know how I shall be able to accomplish my task. For having considered one by one the beautiful virtues that adorned our dear departed friend, I find that each of them would demand a long discourse. The facts of his life are, however, so luminous and so complete in their kind that to attempt to adorn them by a long drawn-out discourse would result rather in obscuring than in embellishing them. In my perplexity the words of Sacred Scripture come to my aid: "He wrought that which was good, and right, and truth, before his God," for Don Cafasso was a priest who wrought what was good and right and truth in every field of the ministry of the Lord.

With this quotation from Holy Writ I begin my discourse, relying on the truth that the logic of facts is more persuasive than the most sublime and labored eloquence. I leave aside those rhetorical embellishments commonly used in funeral orations, and shall confine myself to a simple exposition of the actions thanks to which Don Cafasso, in the exercise of Christian charity, has accomplished all the good that can be done by a minister of Jesus Christ in the course of his mortal life. But before commencing I think it well to make two preliminary remarks: firstly, I shall confine myself to what I have seen with my own eyes, or what has been related to me by trustworthy persons who have lived with him. In this way all that I shall relate will have the testimony of ocular witnesses and will be worthy of belief. Secondly, if I sometimes use expressions reserved for those who have been recognized by the Church as saints, I do not intend to anticipate the judgment of the Church; I intend merely to state the facts of his life, leaving to our Holy Mother the Church, when the time is opportune, to issue that infallible judgment to which we all most willingly submit.

But you, Don Cafasso, have said, and have left in writing, that it was your wish that no one should speak of you when you were dead and in your grave. You wished that your works should remain hidden in order to flee from human glory and the applause of men. Permit us today to do violence to that wish of yours; permit us to make known to the public your virtuous actions, not in order to gain for you the praise of man, for you abhor all worldly praise, but to honor God for whose glory you have expended all your solicitude, all your substance, your whole mortal life.



The fulfillment of every law, the totality of Christian virtues, according to St. Paul, consists in charity. A man raises himself toward God in proportion as he perfects himself in this heavenly virtue, and when this virtue is accompanied by its external fulfillment in a person, that person becomes a perfect Christian, a model of sanctity: "Love therefore is the fulfilling of the law." (*Rom. 13:10*).

This was the virtue that characterized the whole life of Don Cafasso. Every word, every thought, every deed from his tenderest youth to the last moment of his life was a continuous and uninterrupted exercise of charity; it permeated all his duties toward God, toward men and toward himself.

Let us go now in thought to Castelnuovo and observe him in that place of his birth privileged to witness his early life. When only a boy between the tender ages of eight and ten, he is already a model for the other pupils by the marvelous exactness with which he fulfills his duties at school. With what joy and eagerness he goes to church, takes part in all the functions and frequents the sacraments! From this time his apostolate begins. On Sundays when at church, he listens carefully to the word of God so as to be able to repeat it to his companions and friends on his return. He labors at teaching catechism, but his labors are mingled with ejaculatory prayers, acts of patience and the continual offering of his heart to God.

Even at that tender age, he found means to do good to those around him; to give good advice, to reconcile son with father and employer with servant were frequent triumphs of the boy Cafasso. But what was most surprising in this holy youth was the ingenious ways he found to give alms. He renounced all pleasure and amusement; he frequently deprived himself of things most attractive to boys, and even gave of his necessities. He used to put carefully into a basket pieces of bread, fruit, a few coins to be distributed to those in need, who already formed the delight of his young heart because he had already learned to see in them the person of the Savior.

Instead of diminishing with the passing of childhood, these wonderful adolescent virtues went on increasing with the years. At the age of twelve, when he went to Chieri to continue his studies, his companions gave him the name of the new St. Aloysius. The Lord, seeing this tender plant adorned with the rarest virtues, took him out of the world and planted him in the garden of the Church in order to make of him in due time the worthy minister he himself so ardently desired to be. When young Cafasso put on the clerical garb, his parents and friends were filled with joy and all said in their hearts, "This youth is truly worthy of such a holy habit because he walks with righteousness and works with justice in all his actions": *Operatus est bonum et rectum*.

When he became a cleric he resolved to become a saint, and so he determined to continue to live a life of holiness as he had hitherto lived. He was accustomed to say that a young man who had embraced the ecclesiastical state should be filled with two great ideas: that he had given himself up to the Lord, thus depriving the world of all further claim on him; and that he had received the clerical habit from the hands of Jesus Christ Himself, who on a corresponding occasion had said to His apostles, "You are the light of the world." (*Matt. 5:14*). "Woe to you if you allow that light to become extinguished, thus leaving yourself in obscurity and forcing others to walk in darkness!" Such expressions of his were, we might say, the plan that regulated his whole life. Both at home in his native district and in the seminary, his superiors and companions were filled with admiration for him. His promptness and diligence in study, the facility with which he grasped difficulties, his obedience to his superiors, his affability and patience toward equals and inferiors, his frequenting of the sacraments and assiduity in the practices of piety appeared as a mystery to all who knew him. They were unable to explain how a clerical student so young could have arrived at such a high degree of virtue. They sometimes gave expression to their amazement by saying that the cleric Cafasso had never been affected by original sin.

I have thought it well to give you this glimpse of his early life in order that you may not be surprised at the account of the deeds of which I am now going to speak. For if the life he had led up to then was—in his acts, his speech, his conversation, his dealings with others—a life such as befits one called to the service of the Lord, we must say that his life as a priest was that of a saint: "He wrought that which was good, and right, and truth before the Lord his God in all the service of the ministry of the house of the Lord." (*2 Para. 31:20,21*).

Many of those who had long and intimate acquaintance with Don Cafasso were kind enough to give me both verbal and written accounts of his life, and all were agreed that his life as a priest might rather be called the life of an angel than of a man. He himself has left us in writing the resolutions made at the beginning of his priestly career. He knelt down one day before a crucifix and said, "O Lord, Thou art my inheritance. 'The Lord is the portion of my inheritance.' (*Psalms 15:5*). This is the choice which I have made voluntarily on the memorable day of my ordination. Yes, O my God, Thou art my inheritance, my delight, the life of my heart forever: 'Thou art the God of my heart and the God that is my portion for ever.' (*Psalms 72:26*). But not only, O my God, do I wish to be all Thine; I wish to become a saint, and as I do not know whether my life will be long or short, I protest to Thee that I wish to make myself a saint soon. Let the people of the world seek the vanity and pleasures and dignities of this earth; I wish and desire and seek only to become a saint, and I shall be the happiest of men if I make myself a saint soon—a great saint." This he said, and he kept his word.

With reference to his negative sanctity, which consisted in the absence of all sin and in the avoiding of every voluntary defect, we have the most splendid testimonies. I have read these testimonies, and in addition, have questioned his parents, friends and school companions and other people who had long acquaintance with him. I have asked them whether they ever noticed anything in the life of Don Cafasso that merited reproof, or even that required to be corrected as a defect. All agreed in asserting that, in the forty-nine years of his life, they had never noticed an act, a gesture, a look, a word or even a jest that was unworthy of a virtuous boy, a model cleric and a holy priest. On the other hand, speaking of positive sanctity, which consists in the practice of virtue, all used the most laudatory expressions. Some called him a new St. Alphonsus on account of the innocence and purity of his conduct; others spoke of him as a St. Vincent de Paul on account of the great charity that he showed toward all classes of sufferers. There were some who did not hesitate to call him a St. Charles Borromeo on account of the rigidity of his life and the austerities that he practiced; but while they were amazed at the rigid tenor of his life, they called him a new St. Alphonsus on account of his gentleness, condescension and goodness.

I regret that the time at my disposal for this discourse does not permit me to corroborate these statements by quoting the facts which rise up before me in a long series. I shall confine myself to two classes of the most important ones. The first comprises his manifold activities at the ecclesiastical college attached to the church of St. Francis of Assisi, an institution which for forty years had been a fruitful source of grace and blessings for the diocese of Turin and, one might say, for the whole of Piedmont.

### *The Ecclesiastical College of St. Francis*

The scope of this college is to train young priests in the practical duties of the sacred ministry, particularly in the administration of the Sacrament of Penance and in the preaching of the word of God. The five years' study of elementary theology, even when carried out with diligence and regularity, is hardly sufficient to form a learned, pious and prudent minister of the sanctuary. It is necessary for the young priest to see the practical consequences of abstract principles and hear them expounded, to have certain rules for guidance and certain instructions from an experienced professor in order to form efficient ministers of the sanctuary.

Don Guala, a learned theologian and great benefactor of the clergy, was such a professor. In the year 1817, with the consent of the ecclesiastical authorities, he opened a college for young priests where they could find such instruction. The provision of endowment was a major practical difficulty. The parents of the young priests had, for the most part, exhausted their resources in paying for the education of their sons and had now no funds at their disposal. The industrious charity of Don Guala provided for this necessity, partly from a subsidy from the governor, partly from his own resources, and partly from the subscriptions of charitable friends. Only a small pension that was within the capacity of young priests who wished to take advantage of the college remained to be paid.

Don Guala had discharged the duties of this college as rector and professor for fifteen years with abundant fruit, but the work grew until it was beyond the capacity of one man, and he needed a helper. He needed a man of zeal and prudence and learning to help in the exercise of the ministry in the church of St. Francis, and, at the same time, to assist in the work of perfecting the institution that he had founded. Divine Providence guided him in the choice. Among his students he noticed a young priest of modest aspect, retiring disposition and angelic countenance. From some questions asked and replies received, Don Guala, who was a profound judge of the character of ecclesiastics, saw in that young priest the providential man. He recognized in him profound humility, sublime piety, ability beyond the common, celestial innocence, and consummate prudence. This priest was Don Joseph Cafasso. Don Guala interviewed him, and in a few words an understanding was reached. Don Cafasso became assistant, and in Don Guala he saw only a father of his soul and a faithful interpreter of the word of God. On his part, Don Guala reposed his confidence in his spiritual son and found in him a true disciple and a priest formed after the heart of God. With the aid of such a reliable guide, Don Cafasso perfected himself in the various branches of the sacred sciences and became master of them all, exceeding by far the expectations of his patron. He became a vigilant confessor, a zealous and accomplished preacher, and a prudent master of the moral conferences.

At the time that Don Cafasso commenced to give the moral conferences, the question whether in a case of doubt a person was justified in following a probable opinion, or was bound to take the more probable one, had been agitating the minds of the clergy for a long time, and on this question there were two schools of thought.

Don Cafasso set himself to study profoundly the teaching of both schools, and with his keen intellect and fine judgment, he succeeded in finding a just means of reconciling the teaching of the two schools. He knew that by leaving to all a certain liberty of opinion, and counseling all to practice toward others that charity in the use of the opinion which each one would desire to be used if the case were his own, both the good of souls could be provided for and the glory of God promoted. If

there still remained some small difference, that difference should be weighed in the balance of charity and prudence; in this way full liberty would be left to the sacred ministers to provide for the needs of souls.

Besides this spirit of conciliation, there was to be noted in Don Cafasso a ready, precise and clear style of answering, so that by his explanation every difficulty was removed. The satisfaction given by his clear solution of difficulties attracted large numbers to his conferences. The longer they were, the better the young priests were satisfied, and they were even sorry when they were over.

His deep study of moral, ascetical and mystical theology, together with his ready discernment of spirits, enabled him to judge readily the ability, piety, learning, character and capability of the young priests under his charge. He was therefore able to say with confidence, "Such a one will make a good parish priest, such a one a good assistant, and such another is more fitted to be a rector of some institution or a chaplain to some convent." Thus by each one devoting himself to the apostolic labors suited to his capacity as Don Cafasso advised, those who followed his advice were successful in their careers, and those who sought his guidance and advice were filled with confidence in his judgment.

It is to be noted also that the conferences of Don Cafasso were not mere abstract studies or the result of book knowledge only, but were based on practical experience. He taught the method of hearing the confessions of the faithful fruitfully, and he himself spent several hours daily in the confessional and made careful observation of the results of the advice which he himself gave. He did all this with such skill, or rather with such piety, learning and prudence, that one would be at a loss to say which was the greater—the advantage obtained by those who listened to his conferences, or the consolation of those who had the good fortune of having his spiritual direction. From this profound learning, great experience and, we must add, a special gift from God, he had acquired a marvelous facility and quickness in hearing confessions. A few words, and sometimes just a sigh from the penitent, were sufficient to let him see the state of his soul. He did not speak much in the confessional, but what he said was clear, exact, theologically correct, and adapted to the needs of the penitent, so that a long discourse would not have produced a better effect.

What we have said about the administration of the Sacrament of Penance—that his teaching was based upon his experience—may be applied also to his preaching. He gave rules to the young priests for effective preaching, but he himself first tested the precepts which he gave to others. Oh! If that pulpit could speak, what things it would tell us about the preaching of Don Cafasso—about the clarity of his explanations, the emotions that he aroused in the hearts of his listeners, the abundant fruit that he reaped from them! His zeal and his eagerness to gain souls for God would have carried him to all parts of the world to preach to the faithful, to give triduums and conduct retreats, and he was constantly receiving requests to preach. But he was constrained after a time to reserve most of his preaching for the clergy, who were the portion entrusted to him in a special way by Divine Providence.

The beautiful manner in which he preached caused those present to listen with rapt attention; it was enough to spread the rumor that Don Cafasso was to preach to arouse enthusiasm in the people to go to listen to him. In the pulpit his words no longer appeared to be those of a man but rather of a seraph sent by God to manifest the divine will to His ministers.

How many things I should like to tell you about his marvelous solutions of problems in moral theology given by him in his public and private conferences—about the precious and saintly counsels he gave to young priests, assistants, parish priests and even bishops and other dignitaries of the Church who sought his advice in difficult cases! How many things I should like to tell you about the good he did to young men supported by him during their studies! For some of these he supplied their outfits, while for others he provided funds to enable them to pay their pensions as clerical students, and he received them afterward free of charge into the college for priests. All these are now laboring in various parts of the vineyard of the Lord and are reaping abundant fruit and increasing the glory of their benefactor. And what shall I say about the help he gave to priests in need, and to parish priests who, were it not for his assistance, would have to suspend works useful for the glory of God and the good of souls? All these works have been accomplished and still exist for the glory of our holy religion, which encouraged and inspired such noble and sublime sentiments in the heart of him who understood it so thoroughly and who practiced it so faithfully. Were that not so, how many things to which I merely refer in passing would have to be omitted, for time obliges me to pass on to that form of apostolate which is perhaps the most glorious in the life of Don Cafasso; I refer to his apostolate among prisoners and especially among those condemned to death.

### *Don Cafasso's Apostolate in the Prisons*

Those gloomy places peopled with unfortunate men and women are places most in need of the priestly ministry, but the difficulty of obtaining access to them, the squalor of the surroundings, and the horror which everything connected with them inspired, rendered the exercise of the sacred ministry difficult in them. There was added the further difficulty that besides

courage, there was required prudence, piety and knowledge adapted to that class of people. The result was that many priests, who otherwise were excellent men, were unable to succeed in this difficult ministry because they were lacking in one or other of these qualities. Notwithstanding all this, a small number of priests at that time devoted their ministry to these wretched people.

Outstanding and singular among these was Don Cafasso. Nothing deterred him: neither the armed guards nor the iron doors nor the heavy iron gates locked and barred; nor was he deterred by the darkness and squalor of the place, or by the vermin that infested it. Neither did he show any sign of aversion in finding himself among the numerous criminals, each of whom had struck terror into numbers of travelers and even into the armed forces.

Don Cafasso enters among them. But what language he hears! Here it is cursing; over there, there is quarreling; down below they belch forth terrible blasphemies against God, against the Blessed Virgin and the saints. The courageous priest experiences unspeakable suffering in his heart in such surroundings, but he does not lose heart. He raises his eyes to Heaven, offers himself as a sacrifice to God, and puts himself under the protection of Mary most holy, the assured refuge of sinners.

As soon as he began to deal with and to speak to this new kind of audience, he noticed that they had become savage and brutalized, but that their condition was due rather to want of religious instruction than to real malice. He spoke to them of religion and he was listened to; he offered to return, and his offer was accepted with pleasure. He continued his instructions. He invited other priests to assist him, especially the young priests under his care, and in a short time he succeeded in gaining the hearts of those outcasts of society. Regular sermons were given, the confessions of the prisoners were heard, and soon those prisons which, by the curses, blasphemies and other brutal vices, seemed to be dungeons in Hell itself, were changed into habitations of men who, having learned to be Christians, began to love and serve God their Creator and to sing sacred hymns to the adorable name of Jesus.

O marvelous force of our holy Catholic religion! O admirable Don Cafasso! And what cannot a zealous minister of Jesus Christ accomplish when strengthened by the grace of God!

Before leaving this subject of the prisons, I think it well to say a word on another part of the priestly ministry of Don Cafasso equally sublime, in which his heroic charity shone forth. I refer to his apostolate among those unfortunate men who, after a life of misdeeds, were about to end their days on the gallows.

Don Cafasso was once called to Candia Canavese to attend three men condemned to death, one of whom died impenitent. When he returned to the college, he went to the church of St. Francis and, kneeling before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, he made the following prayer: "Merciful Jesus, if it be Thy will to call me to assist these unfortunate men, most willingly I offer myself for this work, and I ask Thee for the grace that all those whom I shall accompany to the gallows will be converted." At the gallows in Turin the saint assisted sixty-eight men. He succeeded in converting all of them, and, before their deaths, asked them to deliver messages in Heaven as a little service to which he had a right, and he even invoked their intercession.

Whether it was the result of his holiness or that he had received special gifts from God, Don Cafasso was certainly most successful in gaining these unfortunate men for Heaven. As soon as the rumor was out that the sentence of death was about to be passed on any of the prisoners, he broke the news gently to him and began to prepare him for confession and the other comforts of the Church, with the result that when the fatal message of his condemnation arrived, the condemned man received it with indifference, being equally resigned to live or to die.

When the sentence was pronounced, Don Cafasso visited them constantly; he spent the last night with them as far as possible, encouraging them. In the morning he said Mass for them, prepared them for their last Holy Communion, made his thanksgiving along with them, and then entertained them. He laughed and grieved with them, and he would willingly have died along with them if that would redound to the good of their souls.

Whenever possible, Don Cafasso spent the night before the execution prostrate on the ground in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, and he scourged himself to blood in order to secure their eternal salvation.

With the exception of the prisoner whom he assisted on the scaffold at Candia Canavese, whom he had no opportunity to prepare for death, no condemned man was found to resist the charming presence, the consoling words and the charity of Don Cafasso. He himself had the sweet consolation in his own heart—and he related this to his friends for the greater glory of God—that not one of those condemned to death whom he assisted in the last moments died without leaving well-founded hope of his eternal salvation.

Another rare gift of Don Cafasso was the power to inspire great confidence in those whose cases appeared to be desperate. He had the gift of changing desperation into lively hope and inflamed love of God, and it happened sometimes that condemned prisoners who in desperation wanted to kill themselves, having listened to the exhortation of this holy priest, experienced such a change of heart that they were filled with joy and desired only to give themselves into the hands of their executioners in order to make an offering to God in penance for their sins.

On the occasion of the execution of condemned criminals, it was a common thing for the people of Turin to see a cart issuing from one of the prisons bearing the condemned man to the place of execution. The traditional slow tolling of the city bells announced that the execution was imminent. A crucifix was placed in front of the condemned man, and in the corner of the

cart an emaciated image of death. The charitable members of the Confraternity of Mercy, with their faces veiled, marched beside the cart. The executioners and guards in great numbers added terror to the gloomy cortege. But amidst the gloom and terror there was comfort for the man about to die. Seated beside him was a priest who wiped away his tears, encouraged him, and consoled him with the hope of an eternal reward. It was Don Cafasso who, with crucifix in hand, kept repeating, "This is a Friend who will not terrify you, who will not abandon you. Hope in Him and Heaven is yours!" (This crucifix is still preserved in the Little House of Divine Providence founded by St. Joseph Cottolengo.)

It happened once that the obstinacy of a well-known malefactor caused Don Cafasso great anxiety and alarm. But it was conquered by the goodness and charity shown to him. The unfortunate man was moved, and after a moment's reflection said, "Don Cafasso, do you think that with so many crimes on my head I can still save my soul?" Cafasso replied, "I believe it is certain, for who is it that will be able to take you out of my hands? Even if you were in the vestibule of Hell, and if there remained outside but one hair of your head, that would be sufficient for me to drag you from the claws of the devil and transport you to Heaven." "Oh! If that is so," replied the condemned man, "I will die willingly, and let this life of mine be sacrificed to God in penance for my sins." The man met his death with these sentiments. Thus the spirit of faith and hope that Don Cafasso instilled into the hearts of these men was such that most of them mounted the scaffold with joy and welcomed death with a smile on their faces. This made one of the executioners exclaim, "With Don Cafasso present, death is no longer death, but a joy, a comfort and a pleasure!"

Don Cafasso was not satisfied with merely converting these men; he endeavored to make them saints. He not only promised them Heaven, but he promised them that, like the good thief who accepted his death willingly, they would not have to pass through Purgatory if they did likewise. By accepting capital punishment with resignation, as he exhorted them to do, they were performing the heaviest penance that could be imposed on anyone in the world in dying a violent and ignominious death, and therefore were in a state more than any other to go directly to Heaven without passing through Purgatory. As already mentioned, he demanded of them, as a gratuity due to him for his services, that they would deliver messages for him when they went to Heaven.

The Christian courage that Don Cafasso was able to instill into the hearts of the most hardened sinners was not confined to those in prison. Whether just or sinners, all who spoke with him felt arising and increasing in their hearts the love of God and the desire of Heaven. I know of Catholics who could not hear mention of death without trembling, but after having the good fortune of speaking with Don Cafasso about the subject, they immediately felt a calmness and tranquility arise in their hearts which caused them to exclaim, "I no longer fear death; I even desire that it come soon, provided that I have Don Cafasso somewhere near at that moment." Another added that he was content to die whenever it might come since he had been able to have Don Cafasso pray for his happy death.

And how could it be otherwise? The heart of Don Cafasso was like a furnace filled with the fire of divine love, lively faith, firm hope and ardent charity. Accordingly, a single word, a look, a smile, a gesture, his very presence, sufficed to dispel melancholy, drive away temptations, and produce holy resolution in the soul.

The presence of the saint not only inspired courage and confidence in spiritual matters, but even in temporal. A certain priest related that he was often so exhausted as to be hardly able to breathe, but that if he happened to meet Don Cafasso he immediately felt courage reviving in his heart and strength in his body, so that after the interview he was able to resume vigorously his ordinary occupations, which were often very heavy.

### *Wonderful Things in the Life of Don Cafasso*

I have related for you many things about the heroic charity of Don Cafasso, but I have not touched on the most marvelous. It seemed that Don Cafasso was always engaged in preaching to the people; however, he was continually occupied with his theological conferences to his students, training them to preach and hear confessions, and in addition, he gave retreats to the clergy. It seemed that his whole life was devoted to teaching catechism to poor boys, visiting those in prison, instructing them, hearing their confessions; however, in the meantime he appeared to be always in his room giving audiences, or praying or hearing confessions. From a glance at the great amount of writing that he left, a person would conclude that his whole life was spent at the writing desk; notwithstanding all this, we see him giving advice to people of every condition: bishops, priests, founders of charitable works, poor students, rich and poor who were in difficulties, and at the same time attending to and carrying out his most minute domestic duties.

Don Cafasso gave himself indefatigably to the study of Sacred Scripture, Church history, the writings of the Fathers, moral, dogmatic, ascetical and mystical theology, and to preaching; he prepared the cases for the examinations for parish priests, and for the examinations for faculties to hear confessions; in the meantime, if you should come to the church you would



see him kneeling in prayer before the altar of Our Lady, or prostrate in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, or in the confessional with a long row of penitents waiting for their turn to lay before him their troubles of conscience and receive his directions for leading a holy life. But even all that did not exhaust his activities.

If you go to the Consolata church, you will find him taking part in the exercises of devotion; if you visit any church in which the Forty Hours adoration is in progress, you will see him prostrate in adoration, pouring out his sweet affection to his beloved Jesus. And while he fulfills perfectly all these duties, each of which seems to be sufficient to constitute the lifework of an ordinary man, behold him like an angel of peace going about doing good, bringing concord to this family and relieving the distress of that other.

Up there in that miserable attic there is some sick person languishing and groaning; Don Cafasso mounts the rickety stairs, panting as he goes, and brings him consolation. In the palace of that rich man there is some sick person in pain; Don Cafasso goes to hear his confession and comfort him. Then there are people in their death agony; Don Cafasso is by their bedsides, recommending their souls to God. Is one of his penitents in the hospital? He does not abandon him, but visits him with marvelous punctuality. Are there some obstinate sinners who refuse the sacraments on their death beds? Don Cafasso speaks to them, and at his word every heart is conquered, all obstinacy bends before him, and all wild passion is appeased, so that each one thinks of settling the affairs of his soul. In short, you will see Don Cafasso continually occupied in doing good: to the rich man who asks for him, to the poor man to whom he gives aid, to the ignorant whom he instructs, to the afflicted whom he consoles, to the sick whom he visits, to the dying whom he comforts and whose soul he accompanies to the gate of Heaven.

But, my brethren, am I speaking of one man or of several ministers of Jesus Christ? I speak, dear listeners, of one man alone, of a man who has the spirit of the Lord. I speak of that hero who, by his marvelous zeal, showed how much the charity of a priest aided by divine grace can accomplish. Such a priest may in a certain sense be omnipotent, according to the expression of St. Paul: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." (*Phil.* 4:13).

### *Don Cafasso's Secrets for Doing Much Good*

Although the marvelous number of actions of different kinds which Don Cafasso performed almost simultaneously are attributed to a prodigy of charity, they may in a certain way be also attributed to an art, or better still, to certain secrets proper to Don Cafasso. Such secrets show to what a degree of sanctity he had attained in the performance of his duties toward himself. He was not able to keep these secrets so concealed that they did not come to the notice of those who admired his holy actions and saw them reflected in his rare virtues, although he desired to so conceal them.

The first secret was his constant tranquility. The saying of St. Teresa—"Let nothing disturb you"—was familiar to him. Accordingly, he discharged energetically all his duties—even those prolonged and difficult and sometimes impeded by vexatious interference—and at the same time always preserved a smiling appearance, was always courteous, and always showed that sweetness characteristic of holy souls. This marvelous tranquility enabled him to deal calmly with many things of various kinds without disturbance of his intellectual faculties.

The second secret was his long practical experience of affairs of various kinds, joined with great confidence in God. He frequently repeated the words of the royal prophet David: "Day to day uttereth speech and night to night showeth knowledge" (*Psalms* 18:3), by which he meant that he made the experience of each day serve as guide for the next. This maxim, along with his prudence, experience and long study of the human heart, rendered the most abstruse subjects familiar to him. Doubts and difficulties disappeared before him, and the most complicated questions were solved by him with ease. When a question was proposed, he understood it as soon as it was mentioned; he then raised his heart to God for an instant and gave a solution with such promptness and accuracy as could not be equaled by an expert who had given the same question long consideration.

The third secret of his for accomplishing many things was his punctuality and his constant occupation of time. In the space of over thirty years that I have known him, I do not remember him ever spending a moment that could be called idle. As soon as one occupation was finished he immediately undertook another. How many times he was seen spending five and even six hours in the confessional and then going to his room where he immediately began his accustomed audiences! How often he arrived for his conferences after finishing a sermon or hearing confessions in one of the prisons! When invited to rest for a moment, his invariable reply was that the conference would serve as a rest. Accordingly, with cheerful countenance he went to perform this or that new duty as soon as the previous one was completed. He never took part in any amusement to recreate his spirit, and never joked or uttered an idle word; the only recreation for him was a change of occupation when he was oppressed by fatigue. When, for example, he was exhausted from preaching, he knelt down and prayed; when he was tired from writing, he went and visited the sick, or heard confessions in the prisons or elsewhere.

The fourth secret was his temperance, or rather his rigid austerity. From the time of his youth he was so sparing in what he ate and drank that he was able after his meal to undertake any scientific or literary occupation. Later on, he gave up taking the small collation in the morning, and then he omitted the midday meal, thus limiting his nourishment to a sole repast. When people said to him that he was ruining his health and hastening his death, his brief reply, worthy to be remembered, was, "Without great sobriety it is impossible for us to become saints." He paid no attention to remonstrances, but only increased his austerity, limited his nourishment to one meal a day, and even limited the amount of food for that one meal until it consisted of a little bread and soup with the addition of a little of some other food. He frequently deprived himself of the addition, so that he passed whole days on a little bread and soup alone. In this way, every day, every week, every month and entire years became for him a rigid, terrible fast. Thus the whole day, with the exception of the few moments required to swallow this frugal repast, was available for work, and it was spent in the service of the Lord and for the good of souls.

Finally, Don Cafasso gained time for useful work by curtailing his repose. The only rest that he allowed his delicate body during the day was three quarters of an hour after his one meal. This he spent shut up in his room in praying, meditating or some special exercise of piety. At night, he was the last to retire to rest, and in the morning, he was the first to rise. The duration of his repose at night never exceeded five hours, and often it was only four, and sometimes three. He was accustomed to say that a churchman should awaken only once in the night. We may conclude from this remark that when he awoke, no matter what the time might be, he immediately arose from his bed to pray, meditate or to occupy himself with some other business.

Sometimes he was told to have regard for his health and rest a few hours longer, but he always replied, "Our rest will be in Heaven. O Heaven, Heaven, whoever thinks on you will not suffer from weariness!" At other times he would say, "Man is truly unhappy in this world; the only thing capable of consoling him would be if he were able to live without eating and without sleeping in order to labor solely for Heaven."

By means of these five secrets Don Cafasso found a way to accomplish many varied tasks in a short time and thus carry his love for God and his neighbor to the most sublime degree of perfection: "Love is the fulfilling of the law." (*Rom.* 13:10).

I have but merely referred to these and other things, for in order to give you a complete account of them it would be necessary for me to relate a whole series of facts, and this cannot be done within the limits of a discourse like this. But here I would like to put a question to you all, and would be very pleased to have your reply: In reading the lives of the saints whose virtuous actions form the annals of the Church, have you ever found in them a collection of good deeds so different and varied, but united in a single person and performed by one person alone? I do not know what your reply will be, but for my part, I have to say that I have found many who shone in a heroic way, some in this virtue and others in that, but I believe that it is a thing altogether rare to find one who unites in his own person such wisdom, such practice of good deeds, such prudence, fortitude, temperance, such zeal for the things that tend to promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls as we find in the person of Don Cafasso. In him was fulfilled literally what the Holy Spirit has revealed in Sacred Scripture: He finished his life in a short time, but he accomplished as much work as if he had reached old age. "For venerable old age is not that of long time nor counted by the number of years . . . A spotless life is venerable old age . . . Being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time." (*Wis.* 4:8-13).

The time at my disposal for dealing with the saintly life of Don Cafasso is now exhausted. I know, however, that you are most anxious to hear some particulars about his precious and holy death, and I shall endeavor to satisfy that desire.

### *His Precious Death*

Don Cafasso was only approaching his fiftieth year, the time of life when a man has already gained experience and is in a position to deal with the affairs of the world. Although he was of delicate constitution and lived a very active life, he was still energetic for that age, for he enjoyed sufficiently good health and was free from serious infirmities. He was hardly ever sick. However, during the last months of his life he appeared to be worn out by his labors and exhausted by his penances and fasts; nevertheless, he did not cease from his apostolic labors of various kinds. But quite suddenly, he changed his manner of speaking and thinking and acting. He had a priest called to his room and he arranged with him that he should give the Spiritual Exercises at the sanctuary of St. Ignatius, saying that he himself was no longer able to go there. When asked for the reason, he replied, "You will know the reason later on." He ceased from occupations outside the house; he entrusted the sick, whom he was accustomed to visit with so much charity, to other priests, and asked them to take care of them. He himself remained almost continually in his room putting everything in order as if he were about to set out for eternity.

In the meantime, certain events occurred which we will pass over in silence, but which helped to deprive us of a life so useful and so precious.<sup>1</sup>



He was assailed by many troubles at the same time: his strength became exhausted; his stomach became disordered; he got a disgust for the world and a longing for Heaven, and this longing accompanied him everywhere and was the object of all his thoughts.

It was Saturday the 9th of June, 1860. Don Cafasso, although already ill, went to the confessional. With more than usual fervor he spent four and a half hours hearing confessions. Then about half past eleven o'clock on that memorable morning, contrary to his custom he appeared disturbed, or I should rather say, with a countenance indicating that something extraordinary was about to happen to him. He left the confessional—not without effort—and went and knelt before the high altar. There he read the following prayer composed by him, a copy of which he kept in his manual of devotions:

"O my sweet Jesus, in addition to the many graces which Thou hast conferred on me in the course of my life, I ask Thee for this further one: when my soul shall have departed from this world, not only that it be not condemned to Hell, but that it shall not be compelled to remain away from Thee for even a moment in Purgatory. It is true that I am a debtor to Divine Justice, but I hope to be able to pay all my debts from the infinite merits of Thy Passion and Death. O Heaven, holy city of my God, my dear native land! Oh, how I sigh for thee! O happy day when I shall reach thee! O Heaven, my dear Heaven, come quickly and satisfy the desires of a wretched heart that sighs for thee!

"My God, I accept whatever kind of death it may please Thee to send me, with all the terrors, all the pains, all the sufferings that shall justly accompany it. Finally, I pray Thee to accept the destruction of my body as the last act of homage that I can offer to Thy Supreme Divine Majesty, in satisfaction for the offences committed in the course of my life.

"O Mary, I ask thee for one more grace: Obtain from thy Divine Son that I may die, but that I may die with thee, and that I may fly to Heaven along with thee. O merciful Mother, grant that when my soul is liberated from this wretched body I may go immediately to find thee in Heaven, there to commence that life which will be my occupation for all eternity.

*"Requiem aeternam dona mihi, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat mihi. Requiescam in pace."*

Having pronounced these words, which sounded like the burial rites for the dead, Don Cafasso remained as if rapt up to Heaven. He knelt motionless for a good while and then went to his room. He remained shut up there on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, with the exception of the time he spent in the confessional. On Monday, not without effort, he went for the last time to the confessional, but after a few hours he was constrained to return to his room, never to leave it again. Before laying himself on the bed, he knelt down and recited the following prayer worthy of a seraph in Heaven:

"The sorrow that I experience, O Lord, for not having loved Thee, the desire that I feel to love Thee ever more, render everything else wearisome to me, and this life a burden. I therefore pray Thee to shorten my wretched days on earth and to remit to me my Purgatory in the next life, so that I may be able to go soon to enjoy Thee in Heaven."

Having finished this prayer, in order not to fall exhausted on the ground, he placed himself on the bed.

His ailment was an affection of the lungs with hemorrhage of the stomach. The doctors did all that art and affection could suggest, and they had hopes of curing him. He himself, however, from the first days of his illness, expressed his belief that death was near; he said several times that he would never recover. One of his servants wanted to go to the sanctuary of St. Ignatius to prepare the place for the Spiritual Exercises that were going to commence there. Don Cafasso called him to his bed and said to him, "Do not leave yet for a while to go to the sanctuary until you have seen me depart for Heaven."

The servant who waited at table asked him on the first day of his illness whether he should lay his place at table as usual. "There is no need," he replied immediately, "my place is already prepared in Heaven." For these and several other reasons, we may confidently assert that Don Cafasso had received a clear revelation of the time, the day, the hour and other particulars of his death. Here I will just refer in passing to his tranquility, patience, resignation and lively faith for which he was remarkable during life but which reached heroism in this last illness. The bitter medicines were drunk, and painful operations of different kinds were submitted to, not only with resignation but with pleasure. He was firmly convinced that the pains of this illness would be his Purgatory and that as soon as the soul separated from the body it would fly straight to Heaven.

When asked whether he had any message to leave, anything to write, any order to give, he replied laughing, "I have always preached that every Christian should before retiring leave his affairs settled as if it were the last night of his life. Wouldn't it be a nice thing, then, if I myself had not done so, and had waited until now to settle my affairs? Everything has been settled; everything has been arranged. One thing alone remains still to be dealt with; it is that which regards Heaven—yes, Heaven that I shall soon possess."

Here I must pass over many things said and done in the course of his last illness, such as his desire to remain alone in order to be free to converse with God; the fervent ejaculatory prayers which went up from him continually to God, the Blessed Virgin and other saints; the holy dispositions with which he received the Last Sacraments, Extreme Unction, the papal blessing; the blessings given by him to his friends and especially the dear students of the college. These things were so touching that all who were present wept, and we should all have to weep again, if they were related one by one with their accompanying circumstances. I shall pass them over then and come to the thirteenth day of his illness, Saturday the 23rd of June, the last day of the mortal life of Don Cafasso.

He had received the young priests of the college in his room and had given them some mementos such as a dying father

would leave to his beloved sons. Early on the morning of that day he asked that Mass be celebrated in the oratory adjoining his bedroom, and at the Mass he received Holy Communion, which was for him the Viaticum that was to accompany him to a happy eternity. Having received Viaticum he asked to be alone in order to converse with his Divine Lord and His Blessed Mother. And while you, Don Cafasso, are engaged in conversation with God, and while the prayers for the dying and the "Depart, Christian Soul" are being read, we will meditate for a moment on your death.

Look, dear brethren, at that man in his agony and tell me if his death is not the death of the just, a death truly precious in the sight of God: "With him that feareth the Lord, it shall go well in the latter end: and in the day of his death he shall be blessed." (*Eccl.* 1:13). Don Cafasso is at the last moments of his life; he has nothing further to wish for in this world. He desired to spend all his substance for the greater glory of God, and this he has done, for during the whole course of his life he never spent a cent to satisfy a taste or to provide amusement for himself. Whatever of his substance was not given away in charity during his life, he left for religious purposes after his death, so that he could say to the Lord, "I have given everything for Thy love, and I have followed Thee in sufferings and tribulations." "Behold we have left all things and have followed Thee." (*Matt.* 19:27).

He desired to employ his voice, his strength and his whole life to gain souls for God. This desire was entirely fulfilled, for as we have seen, in the space of life equal to his we could not expect a mortal man to accomplish more than he did. He could therefore say with St. Paul, "I have fought a good fight: I have finished my course." (2 *Tim.* 4:7).

He desired to die soon in order to leave a wicked world in which evil parades in triumph. He finished his life at the early age of forty-nine, when, according to human calculations, he had still many years to live. But in the course of a short life he had accumulated for himself much treasure in Heaven: "Being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time." (*Wis.* 4:13).

He desired and every day asked the Lord for the favor of receiving the comforts of our holy religion, and this favor was abundantly granted. He went to confession many times during the course of his last illness, and many times received his Divine Lord in Holy Communion. He received Extreme Unction and the papal blessing with plenary indulgence, which he wished for so ardently.

He desired to suffer in the course of his illness and thus put in his Purgatory in this life. God heard his wish. For the thirteen days of his painful illness he suffered very much from a hemorrhage of the stomach, and it was only with difficulty that he was able to speak. All the time he retained the use of his reason and of all his senses up to his last breath, so that he was able to offer his sufferings to the Lord and merit a bright crown in Heaven: "For the rest there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord the just Judge will render to me." (2 *Tim.* 4:8).

He prayed and many times besought the great Mother of God that he might die on a day dedicated by the Church to her, and his death occurred on a Saturday, a day consecrated by the Church to Mary. It was also within the octave of Mary Consolatrix, and on the vigil of St. John, who is the principal patron of pious works of mercy for those condemned to death, to whose benefit he had devoted so much care.

Finally, he desired ardently to breathe forth his soul in the arms of Mary. Many, many times he repeated during life, "O Mary, dear Mother Mary, how beautiful it would be to die with thee and to be assisted by thee; I hope and I ask as the greatest of your favors that you come to assist me at the last moments of my life. Oh then when I shall see thee I shall throw myself into thy arms!"

But behold! Who is it that Don Cafasso sees? Greatly moved, he opens his eyes and appears to wish to speak; he raises his hands, and his whole body appears to be lifted up in the air. Is it not Mary who has appeared to him? Yes, Mary has come to comfort him, Mary assists him and calls him. Don Cafasso expires and his soul is carried by Mary to Heaven.

Go then, O noble, generous, magnanimous soul, fly to take your place among the blessed in Heaven. Your prayers have been heard; Mary herself deigns to bring you with her in order that you may be near to her to thank her and bless her for all eternity. Go then, O worthy minister of the living God. Jesus Christ is already speaking for you to His Eternal Father and saying to Him, "I wish, O Father, that My faithful minister may be here near Me." "I shall go and prepare a place for you . . . that where I am, you also shall be." (*John* 14:3). Behold! Jesus Himself comes toward you, opens His divine lips, and with loving smile says to you (Oh listen to the consoling words), "Courage, you have been My servant, My faithful minister; enter into the glory of thy Lord to live and enjoy forever the happiness of Heaven." "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (*Matt.* 25:23).

Let us, my dear brethren, adore the decrees of God who has taken away from us such a tender father of our souls, and, in the midst of our tears and sighs, let us thank divine bounty which has raised our friend to such glory in Heaven.

But before we leave this place, you, Don Cafasso, can console us in our loss. Deign to cast a look on your friends here assembled as a sign of grateful remembrance of you. And since we can no longer have you as our guide upon earth, we pray you to keep us firm in the Faith, which today is meeting with such terrible opposition. Pray that we may put your holy counsels into practice; that we may follow your example, detach our hearts from the things of this earth, and live in charity toward our neighbor and in love toward God.

But grant, O grant us this grace which we ask with our whole hearts: that before we die we may receive worthily the comforts of our holy religion, that we may be assisted and protected and defended by Mary during the last moments of our

lives, and that we may be accompanied and guided by Mary to Heaven to enjoy and bless God with you for all eternity.

# Preparation for Death

*The following is the text of St. Joseph Cafasso's prayer at the foot of the cross as a preparation for death.*

Great God, prostrate before Thee, I accept and adore that sentence of death which Thou hast pronounced over me. I stand awaiting the coming of my last hour and, knowing that it may come upon me at any moment, I carry myself in spirit to my deathbed to bid adieu to this world and to make now for that occasion a clear and solemn protestation of those sentiments and affections with which I intend to terminate my mortal career and enter into my eternity.

(1) I have sinned. I confess it with all the bitterness of my soul. I detest with my whole heart all the faults that I have committed during my life. For each of them I would be ready to die in reparation for the offence to God, and I would wish to have died a thousand times rather than have offended Him. I ask pardon of God and of men for the evil that I have done, and I will ask it until the last moment of my life in order that I may find mercy on the day of judgment.

(2) Since my wretched body has been the cause of my offending my dear God so much, with my whole heart I make a total sacrifice of it to my Lord as a just punishment for it. Not only do I resign myself to descend into the tomb, but I rejoice and thank God who has given me this means of paying my debt. Through these ashes which will remain from me in the sepulchre and by these bones which will speak for me, I will confess until the day of my resurrection that the Lord is just, and just also the sentence which has condemned me to death.

(3) I thank my parents, companions and friends for the charity they have shown me in putting up with all my defects, and I thank them for all the favors and all the assistance which in their goodness they have given me. I ask pardon of them for having given such a poor return, and for the scandal I have given them. I ask them to continue to give me the charity of their prayers, and, when I am separated from them, I firmly hope that I will see them again one day in Paradise.

(4) As God in His inscrutable Providence has wished that I should have the disposal of temporal interests, I ask pardon if I have not made the use of them that He expected of me. As He alone is Lord of all, I again place everything in His hands.

I intend that the disposition that I have made or that I shall hereafter make may be for His greater glory, and, in that portion of life that remains for me on earth, it is my firm will and determination to spend all that remains to me when my needs are satisfied, for the work of the Lord, being disposed and indeed desirous to strip myself of everything whenever God wishes it of me.

(5) With regard to the most important point, which is the spiritual preparations for that day which will be my last, I render the most sincere thanks to God for having thus disposed of me and taken me out of the world. I salute and desire and bless that day that will put an end to my own sins, and take me away from the midst of so many sins that are committed on the earth. I now in advance thank that person who will give me the consoling message, and, until that day arrives, I shall regard it as so dear to my heart that I would not exchange it for the greatest day of this world.

(6) I entrust my death to the love and care of my heavenly Mother. In her tender heart I place my last hour and my last

sighs. It is in the arms of this Mother that I wish to leave this world and enter my eternity. I intend that every sigh which I shall give at that moment, every breath and every look, shall be voices which call her, which solicit her help for me from Heaven, so that I may soon see her, contemplate her, embrace her and may be able to die with her help. But if, by special favor of her tender heart, she wishes to call me on a day consecrated to her, it would be a still greater consolation for me to be able to present to her the offering of my life at a time when Heaven and earth celebrate a feast in honor of her name and of her great mercies.

(7) I recommend in a special manner my passage to eternity to St. Joseph, the spouse of Mary, whose name I unworthily bear, to my guardian angel, to my two special protectors, St. Ignatius and St. Alphonsus Liguori, to all the angels and saints of Heaven, and to those souls in Paradise who remember me. I salute them all from this valley of tears, and I appeal to each one of them to pray for me that the happy day will soon come when I shall meet them face to face and enjoy with them that feast that will have no end.

(8) For everything concerned with the time and circumstances of my death, after the example of my divine Redeemer, I resign myself fully to whatever the Heavenly Father has arranged for me, and I accept the death that God in His eternal decrees considers best for me. To fulfill His will, I accept all the pains that He wishes me to suffer at the time of death. In this hardest sacrifice and in my most painful agony, I wish and intend that His holy will be always done.

(9) With my whole being I give thanks to the good God who, by His special mercy, has willed to call me to the Faith at my birth and place me, unworthy that I am, as a son in the arms of the Church. I today renew those promises that were made for me at the sacred font. I grieve for and detest whatever there has been in my life not in conformity with those promises. I condemn and regret anything that during my life may have been wanting in obedience and respect to the Holy Roman Catholic Church. Today and always I formally declare that I wish to live in the closest communion with that good Mother. To her I entrust my ashes that she may bless them and keep them in her custody until the day of judgment.

(10) I desire and ask for all the sacraments and comforts which our holy religion has reserved for her dying children at the hour of death; and when the Lord shall demand the sacrifice of my life, I intend to unite it to that which so many confessors of the Faith have made and to breathe forth my spirit in homage of and for the support of our holy Faith.

(11) As I am about to finish my mission on earth, I give back and consign to God that grand vocation with which He has willed to adorn me. I have no words here below to thank Him worthily for it, and I await eternity to do so. I thank with all my heart all those who have employed themselves to this end for me, and I recommend myself to each of them in order that I may obtain mercy at the great moment in which I shall be called upon to render an account of my earthly career. I shall die, and the thought consoles me that with my death there will be one less unworthy minister upon the earth, and that another more zealous and fervent priest will come to make up for my coldness and other defects.

(12) As I am certain with the certainty of faith that God can, and that He wishes, to pardon all those who repent of their sins, relying on that firm confidence which cannot be deceived, and penetrated with the most lively sorrow for my past faults, I protest that I hope most firmly for pardon of all my failings and for the attainment of my eternal salvation. Whatever be the assaults that my enemy may launch against me in life or in death, I will repeat that I believe in my God, that I hope in Him and that He will save me.

(13) Now that my days are about to finish, and that time is about to vanish for me forever, I know and understand better than in the past my duty on earth, which is to know and serve my God. As long as life remains I will lament that time in which I have not loved Him, and I will repeat continually from now on, "Either to love or to die." Whatever I shall have to do or suffer

in this miserable life, I intend that it be a proof of love for my God, so that living, I shall live only to love, and dying, I may die in order to love still more.

(14) The sorrow which I experience, O Lord, for not having loved Thee, the desire which I feel to love Thee ever more, renders this life burdensome and distasteful, and makes me pray Thee to shorten my days on earth, and to pardon me my Purgatory in the next life, so that I soon may arrive at loving Thee in Paradise. I ask of Thee this grace, O Lord, not through fear of punishment—which I confess that I deserve a thousand times more—but from the sincere desire to love Thee much, to love Thee soon, and to love Thee face to face in Paradise. Let the anguish which I feel, O God, for not having loved Thee, and the danger which I am running of offending Thee and not loving Thee more, serve as my Purgatory!

(15) Finally, when I shall have departed to the grave, I desire and pray the Lord to make my memory perish on this earth so that no one shall any longer think of me except to pray for me—a favor which I ask from the charity of the faithful. I accept as penance for my sins all that shall be said against me after my death. I condemn and detest all the evil that may in the future be committed because of me. I wish that I could prevent all the sins of the world by my death, and so I would be ready to die as many times as there are sins committed on the earth. Oh! May the Lord accept this poor sacrifice so that when dying, I may have that sweetest consolation of sparing one offence to my Lord on that day.

This is my firm will and determination with which I intend to live and die in each and every moment that God may wish to dispose of me.

I place the moment of my death in the hands of my dear Mother Mary, of my good angel guardian and of my special protectors, St. Joseph, St. Ignatius and St. Alphonsus Liguori, all of whom I expect to assist me at the hour of my death and in my voyage to eternity. Amen.

Come then, welcome death. Come, but conceal thy coming, so that the hour of death may not give life back again.

It will be no longer death for thee, my soul, but a sweet sleep if, when thou art dying, Jesus assists thee, and if when thou art expiring, Mary embraces thee.

# Visits to the Blessed Sacrament

*Special aspirations and petitions for every day of the week, which Don Cafasso was accustomed to make at his daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament.*

Thou art my portion and my inheritance, O Lord. This was the choice that I solemnly made on that ever memorable day of my ordination. O happy day, day a thousand times blessed on which such a glorious inheritance fell to my lot! Let the lovers of this world keep their possessions, though they be as great as they desire; for me, my God alone is sufficient! And what are riches and honors and pleasures? From this moment I bid them an eternal adieu. I desire only, I desire always, I desire in everything my dear Jesus. I wish that Thou be now and forever the God of my heart and my All:

*Deus cordis mei et pars mea, Deus in aeternum.*

This expression of my will I present to Thee, this day, O my Jesus, with all the ardor of my heart, and I intend to renew it at every glance, at every sigh toward Thee, and principally when I find myself in danger of offending Thee, my God, or of violating this my plighted faith. Oh! Rather death, O Lord, than rob Thee in little or in much of any portion of my heart.

Do thou, O my dear Mother Mary, present this expression of my will to thy dear Son Jesus, and accompany it with thy prayers which have never been refused. Oh what hope, what consolation for me if thy heart and thy tongue, O dear Mother, speak and plead for me this day!

Accept, O my Jesus, this offering, miserable in itself but presented by such pure and holy hands! Accept it as a pledge of my attachment to Thee. Hide it within Thy wounds, seal it with Thy blood, and grant that this may be always my firm determination—especially at that moment when, leaving this world, I shall go to Thee to render an account of my promises and of the many years of my priesthood—in order that in time and in eternity Thou mayest always be my God, my portion, and my inheritance!

*Deus cordis mei et pars mea, Deus in aeternum.*

## MONDAY

My dear Jesus, my heart and my All! Oh how much my heart is consoled amidst the dangers of this world when I think that I am Thine and no longer mine! And since I am Thy possession, I wish to abandon myself into Thy hands; I wish to place all that I have in Thy keeping, as my good Father. Behold! I give into Thy hands, O my God, all that I have in this world: my life, my health, my possessions, my honor—in a word, my whole self. Do not regard my convenience, my pride, my delicacy; and even if I should show resentment, pay no attention to it. Dispose of all as a good Father, according as Thy glory and the advantage of my soul demand. Above all, I consecrate to Thee my will; with Thee, O Lord, I do not wish to have any will of my own; I desire that Thy holy will be my will also. O my God, I wish to labor in Thy service and to strive with my whole



being to promote Thy interests during whatever time it may please Thee to leave me in this world. Thou seest my heart: I wish to labor not according to my own ideas, but according to Thy will. Deign to make known to me what Thou wishest of me, and how and where Thou wishest it. Behold me ready to carry out Thy commands without reserve and without exception. Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. Speak, O Lord, but speak in such a way that I may understand Thee, so that it can be said of all my actions that this is what God wishes that I should do.

But this is not the last grace that I desire from Thee this day. I ask for the grace to know Thy will and to be able to do it, but that is not sufficient for me; I wish to do it, yes, but to do it with pure and holy intention, to do it solely for Thy pleasure so that I may be pleasing to Thee.

O my Jesus, what remorse I feel at heart when I ask myself the question whether my works and labors are all for Thee, and think that perhaps there may be some aim or object in them other than for Thee. Today, here at Thy feet, I weep over every want of pure intention, and will continue to weep. Oh what an injustice to Thee, my God, and what loss for myself! Oh how foolish I would be if I should throw to the winds the fruit of my sweat and labor! I here and now protest to Thee, O my Jesus, that I wish to seek for nothing henceforth but Thy divine will and pleasure. Far from me be every other end save only Thee, my God! Cursed be every work and every movement of my heart which is not directed by Thee and toward Thee! When I come before Thy tribunal, may I be able to reply frankly that I have never sought anything during my days here below but Thy pure glory, Thy honor, and the salvation of the souls created by Thee! Amen.

## *TUESDAY*

O my dear Jesus, my sweet love, I have not the heart to go away from Thee without entrusting to Thy mercy the multitude of poor souls whom, as Thy priest and minister on earth, I cannot and never should forget. I commend to Thy mercy also all those unhappy sinners who are hanging over the brink of Hell. I recommend to Thee all those who are groaning in the agony of death, all the souls who are suffering in Purgatory and all others who in this world or in the next have any claim on my prayers.

Oh my dear Jesus, I place them all within Thy wounds, and for all of them my suppliant prayers and sighs go up to Thee; for all of them, with my whole heart I beg for pity and mercy. Remember, O my God, that they have been created to Thine image, that they are the work of Thy hands, and that they have been purchased by Thy Precious Blood. Open then, O my Jesus, the treasury of Thy mercies, to the delight and glory of Heaven and to the confusion of Hell. Draw back from the way of perdition all those unfortunate sinners who are rushing to the infernal precipice! Hasten to the aid of those who are groaning in the agony of death! Liberate from the flames of Purgatory those souls who are so dear to Thee! Grant to the multitude of the afflicted in this world a taste of Thy consolation! Among all these I commend in a special manner to Thy mercy the greatest sinner in Thine eyes, the dying person in greatest danger of damnation, the most abandoned soul in Purgatory, and the most desolate person on this earth.

O dear Jesus, who while on earth hast stated that from the very stones Thou couldst raise up children of Abraham, on this day change one of the greatest sinners into one of Thy most faithful and loving friends! O Thou who hast promised never to abandon us in our exile, do not withdraw Thy presence, do not abandon those who are in danger of perishing in their struggles with the assaults of Hell! O Thou who, in order to open to us the gates of Heaven, hast submitted Thyself to so many humiliations and trials, and hast endured so many sorrows, open them now in pity for that soul which is sighing in the deepest recess of Purgatory! O Thou who hast made known Thy predilection for those who suffer tribulation in this world, alleviate with a little sweetness the bitter trials of so many souls!

O Lord, I would wish to be able to give my blood and my life, as Thou hast done, for many poor souls, but since such has not been granted to me, I wish at least to commit my life into Thy hands, and to offer and consecrate to Thee for their advantage all that I shall do and suffer during this miserable life. But of what use are the acts of homage and the offerings of a soul so slothful and tepid as mine? To supply for their deficiency I have recourse to Thy merits, O my Jesus; I offer Thee for their comfort and help Thy Passion, Thy Precious Blood and Thy death. O my Jesus, who with a single word from the cross to Thy heavenly Father hast converted so many obstinate sinners "who returned striking their breasts," speak from the tabernacle a second time that word which will be sufficient to change sinful men, as they are, into so many devoted and faithful followers of Thee. What great glory will be Thine, O my Jesus, on the day of general judgment, when it will be seen that Thy mercy has been able to triumph over so many hardened and obstinate hearts! What praise will resound from the hosts of angels and saints! What ignominy and rage for Hell, and what acts of gratitude from so many souls thus saved from perdition!

O Eternal Father, who, in order to save sinners, hast sent Thine only-begotten Son from Heaven to this earth, cast a look from Heaven on the multitude of miserable sinners, and apply in their favor one drop of the Precious Blood which Thy Jesus has shed for them! And in order that Thou mayest not deny me this favor, I ask it through the merits of Thy Son. "Look," I will say to Thee, "look on the face of Thy Christ! Behold that head bowed down, those arms extended, that heart pierced by the lance! All this cries out for, all this demands, pity and mercy."

O Mary, to thee I turn, for to thee, I will say with St. Anselm, it belongs to save so many wretched ones among thy children who are in imminent danger of being lost; to liberate so many souls, who, from the depths of Purgatory, are sighing to see thee; to comfort those in tribulation who trust in thy aid. And to what other person does it belong to help them, except to thee who art their Mother? "Show thyself therefore to be a mother," I will say with Holy Church. *Monstra te esse matrem!* Show thyself to be a mother by obtaining for them those graces which thou knowest to be most necessary! A single word of thine, O Mary, to thy divine Son will be sufficient to strengthen the hearts of those in affliction, to snatch numerous souls from the power of the demons, to fill Heaven with many citizens and earth with an equal number of devoted servants. Accomplish this, O Mary, by that maternal love which reigns in thy heart! It will be all thy glory and the glory of thy divine Son Jesus throughout the ages of ages. This is my hope. Amen.

### WEDNESDAY

O my Jesus, dear and sweet pledge of my heart, my leader and my guide, I come to Thee today to ask Thee, to beseech Thee, for the greatest of the virtues, the one most conformable to Thy desires—holy humility.

O my Jesus, that sweet name fills my heart with love, but such a name at the same time fills me with apprehension. Thy life on earth might be called one continuous school of humility. Thou hast taught humility from Thy cradle, Thou hast practiced humility in the workshop at Nazareth, Thou hast preached humility during the whole course of Thy life, and, not content with preaching it by work and word, Thou hast afterward invited us all to follow Thy example with those beautiful words: "Learn of Me for I am meek and humble of heart." This invitation which Thou gavest during the course of Thy mortal life, Thou dost renew continually from the tabernacle, and Thou dost renew it this day to me: Learn of Me, *my child*, because I am meek and humble of heart. Oh, what a school to learn from, my God, and what teaching! It fills me with confusion and dread. Thou art so humble, and I am so haughty and proud. Thou hast despised the applause of the world, and I am so eager for it. Thou art so patient and submissive under contempt, and I am so sensitive and impatient. O my dear Jesus, I fear, I am alarmed, and Thou knowest it. When I think of that hour when Thou shalt demand from me an account of my humility, what shall I say, O Lord? What reply shall I give? I have confidence that the request that I make Thee this day will avail me in that hour and will appease Thy justice: Give me, O Lord, that humility which my state demands, and which Thou shalt exact of me at Thy tribunal! On other occasions I have asked Thee for the grace to make me a holy priest, a pure priest, a fervent, zealous priest, but today I pray and beseech Thee to make me a humble priest. And what will the other graces avail me, if Thou dost not grant me this one? For what shall I be, if I be not humble? I will say to Thee: If Thou wishest me to be holy, make me humble! If Thou

wishest me to be still holier, make me more humble! Oh what a great grace that would be for me, O Lord! I ask Thee for it, and I would wish to have a thousand hearts and a thousand tongues to ask for it always. Give me therefore humility, profound humility, humility of heart, sincere humility! Grant it to me for love of Thy priesthood, and for the good of the souls entrusted to me! But, O Lord, is not a proud, vain, ambitious priest at Thy altar—among Thy ministers who all breathe forth the sweet odor of humility—an object that Thou shouldst not have to look upon? Change my mind, purify my heart and make it such as befits Thy minister! But if this wretched heart of mine remains obstinate, change it by force, and so dispose that I may find my confusion where I sought my glory, that I may receive contempt where I wished for the applause of men! O Lord, if Thou wilt but grant me this grace, it will be the greatest that I can hope for. In Heaven alone will I be able to thank Thee sufficiently for it, because if I am humble, I am everything, and if I am not humble, I am nothing.

O Mary, I know of no other on whom I can more confidently rely, to whom I can more securely recommend my petition than to thee, to thy good heart. Pray for me, O good Mother, and plead my cause, for nothing can be more worthy of thee or more useful to me! O all ye saints, especially my holy protectors, St. Ignatius and St. Alphonsus, who were models of humility, intercede for me!

*My son, love to be unknown and to be reputed as nothing.*

#### THURSDAY

My most sweet loves, Jesus and Mary, I am here today at your feet to weep over my past years. O lost time! O misspent years in which my Jesus has not been loved, in which I have not loved my dear Mother Mary! "Too late," I shall say to Thee with penitent Augustine; "Too late have I known Thee, O Goodness ever ancient, ever new." But happy am I, O Lord, who have time to bewail my fault in this world! Happy am I for whom there still remain some days to consecrate to Thee! Behold, O Lord, the offering that remains to me to make to Thee! It is, alas, true that I have lost many years that were spent far from Thee, but take at least those few days which Thou mayest be pleased to grant me! Take, O Lord, the remainder of my years! I wish that they be Thine, wholly Thine. They are Thine already by nature, because it is Thou who hast given them to me, but they will be Thine also by my will; to Thee I surrender them, to Thee I give them, to Thee I consecrate them, and henceforth I wish to know nothing else but Thee, my Jesus, Thee and my dear and sweet Mother Mary. Oh would that I might be able to say even once that I am Thine, completely Thine, with nothing of myself! With St. Ignatius who loved Thee so much I ask only for Thy love and Thy grace; if Thou dost grant me these, I shall be sufficiently happy, sufficiently content, sufficiently rich. But if Thou wishest to make me still happier, still more content, give me more love, greater love, more sincere love, more tender love!

But that is still not enough for me, O Lord, for my love is too poor. My heart is too small to love Thee as Thou deservest; I wish to enkindle the hearts of all on this earth with Thy love. The fewer there are who love Thee, O my God, the more ardently I wish that they should love Thee. This other grace, too, I ask of Thee, that I may be zealous for Thy honor, that I may be able to increase Thy glory and do so sincerely, with my whole heart and soul.

O Lord, in these our days men offend Thee so much and outrage Thy honor, and shall I have the heart to remain calm and unaffected? No, my God, that would be too great a wrong against Thy divine goodness and against my own state. O Lord, I am ready to undertake everything for the salvation of the souls created by Thee, and even if it were to cost me my life, what would that be in comparison with what Thou dost deserve? This shall be my occupation henceforth: to kneel at Thy feet, and in Thy divine presence to plead the cause of the great multitude of souls who are rushing to their destruction, and to use all my endeavors to gain for Thee some souls, some hearts, and at least to spare Thee some offences. Oh how happy will I be if on the day of my death when I appear before Thy tribunal I am able to point to some soul saved by me! Deign, O Lord, to bless from the tabernacle this my will! Confirm it, strengthen it, accompany my labors with Thy grace; inflame my words so that I may be able, in Thee and for Thee, to labor worthily in Thy vineyard, and at the end of my days to receive the reward of a good

workman! I ask this grace not only for myself, but for all Thy ministers here on earth. Grant that in these sinful times we may be like so many barriers opposed to the vices which inundate the world, and that, with one accord we may seek not our own interests, our own convenience, our own advantage, but solely Thy pure glory, Thy pure honor, so that one day, accompanied by a great multitude of souls saved by us, we may be able to find a place in Thy company in Heaven! Amen.

*"Either to love or to die." (St. Francis de Sales).*

## FRIDAY

O most sweet hearts of Jesus and Mary, open to me today the treasures of Your mercy! I shall begin by asking for a grace which I eagerly desire; it is that I shall not leave this world without first being fortified by the holy sacraments, furnished with the last papal blessing, which is one of my greatest hopes, and, at the same time, comforted by all the helps that our holy religion has prepared for that last crisis.

Pardon me, my dear Mother, if my daring appears too great! The fault is not mine; thou thyself art the cause: the innumerable great benefits which I have received from thee and the many other favors which thou hast granted to thousands of sinners, urge me on so much the more and give me confidence to ask. If thou hadst done less, I would ask for less; but since thou hast always been diligent to show thyself great, as indeed thou art, I believe that I am but promoting thy designs and exalting thy liberality and power by making such great demands of thee.

Therefore, O Mother, since my last days are approaching, at that hour so terrible for me, at those moments of such peril, do thou come from Heaven with thy Son Jesus to console me, to assist me, to help me. O Mary, what a happy lot will be mine if I see thee at that dread hour appear by the side of my bed of death! This, I know, is a great grace, and great also is my unworthiness; but greater than all is thy mercy. O dear Mother, do not let my expectations be frustrated! In thee I place all my hope now, and in thee I shall put my trust during those last moments. And in order the more to move thee and excite thee to grant me such a favor, I intend that each of my tears and all the sighs and groans that will be wrung from me at that moment shall be so many voices that will call thee from Heaven.

O Mary, I ask this grace from thee through thy divine Son Jesus, whom thou lovest so much; I ask it through the sorrows that thou didst endure at the foot of the cross for me; but I ask it principally relying on that last recommendation which thy dying Jesus made to thee from the cross. Remember, O Mary, that happy moment for me, when thy Son gave me to thee as thy son in His stead: "Woman, behold thy son," and gave thee to me as mother: "Son, behold thy Mother!" O Mother, my dear Mother, when thou hearest my voice, no longer regard it as mine, but as the voice—and, I shall say, as the prayer—of thy dear Son Jesus! Those loving glances which, in His dying moments, He cast upon thee from the cross were so many voices by which He spoke to thy heart for me, or by which He repeatedly impressed upon thee that thou shouldst regard me as thy son: "Woman, behold thy son!" Pardon me, O dear Mother, if I insist so much on my demand. It is not for thy part that I have any fears, but because, without thee, the danger is very great in which I stand of being damned—of being lost, and lost for all eternity.

O Mary, what a sorrowful thought is not this for me, that I may lose thee who art such a dear and tender Mother, and lose thy and my beloved Jesus! And where shall I go, and what shall I do far away from the most sweet hearts of Jesus and Mary? Ah! Rather a thousand Hells, which indeed I deserve, than the loss of thee and of thy dear Jesus! O dear Mother, calm the fear and the alarm of thy poor son who in this vale of tears has no greater comfort than Jesus and no more secure support than thee who art my Mother! And if with thy aid I reach Heaven, as I hope, do not fear, O Mother. I will throw myself lovingly into thy arms, prostrate myself at thy feet, and I will bless thee and praise thee and sing thy mercies and the mercies of thy

divine Son Jesus for all eternity.

The mercies of the Lord, the mercies of Mary, I will sing for eternity. St. Joseph, my special protector and the worthy spouse of so great a virgin, who didst expire so sweetly in the arms of Mary and of thy dear Jesus, present, I beseech thee, my request to thy dear spouse Mary, and to thy beloved Jesus! Speak to them for me, and do thou come along with them to comfort me in my agony at the moment of death!

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give thee my heart and my soul.*

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony!*

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with thee!*

### SATURDAY

O my sweet Jesus, in addition to so many graces that I have asked of Thee during the week, I come today to ask Thee for this last one which I trust to obtain from Thee. Thou hast said that whatever we ask Thy Eternal Father in Thy name would not be denied to us. Firmly relying on that promise of Thine which cannot fail to be fulfilled, I present myself at the throne of Thy Divine Majesty to ask for a grace which I know exceeds my merit, but does not exceed Thy power or Thy mercy. A day will come, and perhaps soon, when I shall leave this world and present myself before Thy divine tribunal. I hope through Thy mercy that Thou wilt not condemn me to Hell. Alas for me! Who knows what time I may have to remain in Purgatory to languish there and sigh for a glimpse of Thy face and for Thy blessed vision? O Lord, I have delayed too long to begin to love Thee in this world for me to delay still more the time when I shall begin to love Thee in Heaven. I ardently desire to reach it immediately in order to make up, when I arrive there, for so many years miserably lost in the pursuit of the vanities of this world. O Jesus, crown the innumerable mercies that Thou hast shown me by granting me this still further one: to free me from those pains of Purgatory and lead me with Thee to Thy glory!

O Paradise, holy city of my God! O native land happily destined to be mine, how I sigh for thee! Oh happy that day which will put an end to the many trials and evils and dangers of this world! O Paradise, my dear Paradise, come quickly and console the desires of a wretched heart that sighs for thee!

O Lord, Thou hast said that where Thou art, there Thy minister will also be. *Ubi sum ego, illic et minister meus erit.* Grant that when I depart from this world I shall have my place with Thee in Paradise! I know well, O dear Jesus, that Thou spokest of a faithful and holy minister, which I certainly am not, but since in Thy goodness Thou hast called me to be among the number of Thy ministers, complete the work now by making me a minister after Thy own heart, a holy minister such as Thou dost desire! But if for a great sinner, such as I am, great reparation is required, and the debts that I have contracted are many and great, I offer Thee a satisfaction still greater: Thy own merits, all of which I present to Thee, and along with them I offer Thee the merits of all the saints who love Thee in Heaven. And in order that I may share in these more copiously, I intend to gain all the indulgences which our holy Mother the Church grants abundantly in life and especially at the death of her faithful members. To this I join whatever little, according to Thy good pleasure, I may suffer in this mortal life—the trials, sorrows, disappointments of every kind that are inseparable from this pilgrimage on earth; and for that end I accept above all my death with all the circumstances with which Thy just will shall accompany it. Finally, I pray Thee to accept the destruction of my body, through which I intend to render my last homage to Thy Divine Majesty, and as the last satisfaction to Thy Divine offended Justice.

O Mary, to thee I am debtor for innumerable graces and favors, and consequently, I owe thee infinite thanks; but as long

as I am in this valley of tears far away from thee, I have no means by which I can thank thee worthily. In Heaven, yes in Heaven, I hope that I shall learn how, and that I shall be able to thank thee as thou deservest; and the sooner I arrive there, the sooner will I sing thy mercies. O Mary, obtain still another grace for me! It is that I may die with thee present and that I may fly with thee to Paradise. Too hard it would be for me, O dear Mother, if I had to remain in Purgatory sighing to see thy face and the face of thy beloved Jesus. Let this valley of tears serve as my Purgatory, where I have not the happiness of gazing at your faces, O my most sweet loves! But when I am freed from this prison, grant, O Mother, that I may not have to see my longed-for happiness deferred, but that along with thee and thy dear Jesus I may begin that life which will form my occupation for all the ages of ages! O dear Mother, plead my cause, and I will never cease, as long as I have life, to exalt and publish thy name and to magnify thy mercy! This is my hope. Amen.

*Requiem aeternam dona mihi, Domine, et lux  
aeterna luceat mihi. Requiescam in pace.*

<sup>1</sup> The events referred to were probably events that occurred during the persecution of the Church by the Freemasonic rulers of Piedmont. The Archbishop of Turin had been banished, and Don Cafasso was watched by government officials because he was a friend of his, and his room was searched shortly before his death.

<sup>1</sup> See First Panegyric, footnote page 24.